

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

21 March 2001

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The Hon. P. R. HALL to 20 March 2001

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Wednesday, 21 March 2001

The **PRESIDENT** (Hon. B. A. Chamberlain) took the chair at 10.02 a.m. and read the prayer.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Sessional orders

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Industrial Relations) — I move:

That so much of the sessional orders be suspended as would prevent new business being taken after 8.00 p.m. during the sitting of the Council this day.

Motion agreed to.

PETITION

Fair Employment Bill

Hon. G. W. JENNINGS (Melbourne) presented a petition from certain citizens of Victoria requesting that the Fair Employment Bill 2000, in the form proposed by the government, be supported by the Legislative Council as a matter of urgency (1665 signatures).

Laid on table.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Workcover premiums

Hon. N. B. LUCAS (Eumemmerring) presented report, together with appendix.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

POLICE REGULATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL

Second reading

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Industrial Relations) (*By leave*) — I desire to make a correction to the second-reading speech delivered yesterday by the Minister for Sport and Recreation, which is reported at page 34 of *Daily Hansard*. It states:

The board came into operation on 2 April this year.

It should read:

The board comes into operation on 2 April this year.

FISHING: ECC REPORT

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I move:

That this house rejects the recommendations of the Environment Conservation Council's *Marine, Coastal and Estuarine Investigation* final report, insofar as the recommendations prohibit recreational and commercial fishing in 24 nominated areas of the Victorian coast, resulting in economic hardship for the fishing industry and coastal communities, and without any guarantee of improved marine environmental outcomes.

It is important for the house to debate the motion today. The Environment Conservation Council (ECC) delivered the *Marine, Coastal and Estuarine Investigation* final report to the Minister for Environment and Conservation on 31 August last year. The report was a culmination of nine years work, with the initial reference being given to the Land Conservation Council in 1991. That inquiry was subsequently carried on by the Environment Conservation Council at its formation in 1997. The report is currently in the hands of the government, and National Party members eagerly await the government's response to it. The report makes 38 general recommendations on matters associated with the management of marine water. The great bulk of the report is devoted to recommendations specifying the classification of particular waters along Victoria's coast.

In large part the report divides Victorian waters into four classifications. It proposes the establishment of 13 marine national parks at various points along the Victorian coast and the establishment of 11 marine sanctuaries. It also proposes 18 special management areas and makes preliminary recommendations on 12 areas to become aquaculture zones.

I make it clear that the National Party is concerned about Victoria's marine environment just as it is concerned about our land environment. In the initial part of my speech I will outline and elaborate on the National Party's approach to environmental issues. I was careful in framing the motion before the house today because it certainly does not imply that the National Party rejects all 38 recommendations of the ECC. Indeed, National Party members applaud and support many of the recommendations and even suggest that some do not go far enough. We reject the notion that excluding activities, in this case fishing — or perhaps we should be more specific and talk about the harvesting of marine species, because even the collection of shells would be prohibited under this

proposal — will bring about environmental benefits. That is why we reject the notion that fishing be prohibited in all of the 24 nominated areas, the 13 marine national parks and the 11 marine sanctuaries, as recommended by the ECC report.

I shall address the reasons for the National Party rejecting that notion, but firstly I turn to its general approach to environmental issues.

I want to make it very clear at the start that the National Party's constituency is country Victoria. We represent country Victorians, and country Victorians more than anyone else appreciate the need for the sustainable use of our natural resources. If we do not care for our land in the country, if it becomes saline or weed infested, it becomes unproductive and we in the country no longer have our jobs. It is in the best interests of people who live in the country and represent the country that land becomes a sustainable resource. It is the same with our timber resources. If we are not careful, if we overutilise those resources, there will be no jobs for our sons and daughters in the future.

The situation is exactly the same with the harvesting of our fish resources. That needs to be done in a sustainable way. Fishing has gone on for generations in the coastal communities of Victoria. If we are not careful and we do not harvest that resource in a sustainable way there will be no jobs for future generations.

We understand that our water resources in the country are not unlimited and therefore we are, I believe, more conservative than city-based people in our use of that natural resource. The notion of using our water and other resources in a sustainable way — and in particular fishing resources, because the motion addresses the issues of fishing — could not be better illustrated than it is in an article on page 5 of this morning's *Age* by a fisherman from Port Franklin, Wayne Cripps, who spoke about the generations of his family that have been involved in fishing at Corner Inlet.

The article spoke about how resources have reached a sustainable level and catches have not decreased in years because of the voluntary cutbacks the fishermen have undertaken. They have limited themselves, under their own voluntary code of practice down at Port Franklin and Corner Inlet, to ensure that their resource is sustainable. It is not just the Cripps family. I have spoken to many others in the Corner Inlet area who have secured a job future for their sons and daughters by ensuring that the harvesting of that natural fishery resource is done in a sustainable way. It is a good article, which I commend to honourable members.

It would be well worth their while to read about the impact that some of the recommendations of the ECC may have on local people.

Incidentally, I note that Wayne Cripps has invited all members of Parliament to come down to Corner Inlet and he will take them on a boat ride and show them some of the area and explain to them the fishing practices employed by the Corner Inlet fishermen. I encourage honourable members to take up that invitation. I believe at the moment it has been largely taken up by National Party members of Parliament.

Hon. E. G. Stoney — Not true.

Hon. P. R. HALL — I said 'largely'.

Hon. E. G. Stoney — Not true. I have already been.

Hon. P. R. HALL — Terrific. I am pleased to hear that on my right we have honourable members who have accepted that invitation already. I do not hear that anybody on my left-hand side has accepted the invitation, but I hope they do so because it will be well worth their while.

In country Victoria we appreciate the need to utilise resources sustainably. What we reject is the simplistic approach of exclusion or prohibition as a means of protecting our environment. To see the result of that one need go no further than to look at the condition of our land-based national parks. The weed infestation in some of those parks is an example of the detrimental impact that exclusion of all forms of activity can have on our environment. I understand Minister Garbutt recently released a report on the state of our parks. Although I have written and requested a copy, I am yet to receive one, but I expect I will in due course. From the publicity given to that report it seems that weed infestation is one of the great problems in our land-based national parks, and we need to do something about it.

That is an example of where just excluding activity and declaring areas for conservation purposes such as national parks will not protect our environment. That will not ensure that the environmental values are sustainable. We have to do more than simply declaring areas to be areas of conservation. We need to put in the resources to ensure that the natural conservation values are protected. As I said, we reject the simplistic approach that simply excluding people and prohibiting the use of those areas will in itself protect the environment.

Members of the National Party believe that use in itself can be an excellent management tool. I will give a

simple example that people will understand. A dairy farmer constituent from Denison came to me recently complaining that the Department of Natural Resources and Environment told him that this year he is not allowed to put up an electric fence along the roadside and graze his cattle as he has done in every year gone past because it helps keep down the level of grass on the roadside. The reason he has not been allowed to do it this year is that there is an excellent growth of native kangaroo grass where he has been grazing his cattle — nowhere else on any other roadside.

It just so happens that where he has been grazing his cattle every year for generations is where the native grass stands best. Why? It is because he has utilised that area. His cattle have cut the grass. It is like mowing your lawn. If you mow it, it keeps on growing. If you do not mow it, it will get to a certain height and then become weed infested. But if you look after it, if you mow the lawn — or in this case graze your cattle on the native grasses — it comes back and grows better. That is why the department says this stand of native kangaroo grass in Denison is an excellent example; it has been utilised over a long period.

Fire can also be an excellent management tool. We in the National Party have complained many times that we still do not do sufficient controlled burning of our state forest areas. To understand that one need go back only three years ago to the Caledonian fire in the Alpine National Park in December 1997. It was interesting talking to the fire officer in the Department of Natural Resources and Environment after that fire event. The officers overlapped a map that showed areas where there had been controlled burning in recent years against areas where there had not been controlled burning, and it was clear that the fire caused the greatest environmental damage in areas where there had been no recent controlled burning.

Controlled burning in itself reduces the build-up of fuel on the forest floor, so that when there is a natural bushfire the impact of the fire is nowhere near so great. The land has recovered better where there had been some controlled burning than where there had not. That is proof enough that we need to employ better management tools if we are going to protect our environment.

We who live in the country and represent country people are also sick of country people being made the scapegoats for environmental issues. I do not say that lightly.

An Honourable Member — That is nonsense.

Hon. P. R. HALL — It is not nonsense. The biggest polluters of our environment in this country are the big cities, like the city of greater Melbourne with its three and a half million people. It is Melbourne's avaricious appetite for water that impacts on our natural resources in country areas. Melbourne takes over three-quarters of the water resource in the Thomson Dam each year, whereas that water resource normally kept our rivers and lakes healthy in the Gippsland Lakes area. There is a need for that water in the city, so Melbourne has harvested it and taken it away from the natural environment of Gippsland. We appreciate — —

Hon. G. D. Romanes interjected.

Hon. P. R. HALL — I am not setting country people against city people. What an absurd statement. Let me finish what I am talking about, then you can make your contribution, Mrs Romanes.

What I am saying on this point is that we appreciate that Melbourne has a need for water — of course it does — but we also say that it does not have regard for the use of that water in a caring and conservative fashion. We read recently about 200 million litres of water a day being poured in the ground around the City Link tunnel purely to stabilise the earth. What a wicked waste of good quality drinking water! We see people in Melbourne with the most luscious gardens one could ever see in this state, but if you drive around country towns at the moment you see parched lawns that are grey or brown. There is a far lower level of automatic water sprinkling systems in country gardens than in city gardens.

People in the country — I will argue this at every opportunity — are far more conservative in their use of natural resources and caring for the environment than people in the city because we can see the immediate impact. People who live in Melbourne cannot. Indeed it is our cities that are our greatest polluters. Their appetite not only for water but for power, sand, cement — all those things — impacts more on the environment of this state than the practices of any other single group of people.

The pollution created by the cars and trucks and street run-off into local rivers, creeks and Port Phillip Bay has a greater environmental impact on the state, yet seemingly almost non-judgmental blindness is given to these matters. Each year we hear about the E. coli levels in Port Phillip Bay which prevent people swimming. It is a one-day wonder. We hear about it one day in the paper and the next day the beaches are declared safe and no further action is taken. Land-based activities

have a greater impact on the marine environment than the relatively benign activity of fishing.

When Melbourne has a problem it too often seeks to find the solution in country Victoria, which impacts on the environment in country Victoria. I refer honourable members to the power issue. If Melbourne is short of electricity the alternative is to build something like Basslink, the electricity connection between Tasmania and Victoria, as a solution to the long-term power needs of the state. We recognise that may be necessary, but for goodness sake, at least, some consideration should be given to the environment of the people living in south Gippsland.

We do not want those huge ugly pylons across the landscape and in our backyards in south Gippsland. If the government wants to ensure sustainable levels of power to meet the needs of future generations, the people living in south Gippsland should be given the courtesy of having money allocated so that the cabling can be put underground.

The first solution to the problem of bats in the botanic gardens was to relocate them to country Victoria. We will get rid of them out of Melbourne — offload the problem by getting rid of them to Mallacoota!

Hon. E. C. Carbines — On a point of order, Mr President, Mr Hall is talking about bats in the botanic gardens, which has absolutely nothing to do with the recommendations of the Environment Conservation Council.

Hon. P. R. HALL — On the point of order, Mr President, the motion addresses the recommendations of the Environment Conservation Council. Many of the 38 recommendations do not relate to fishing but to other environmental issues such as the use of water, water run-off and other similar issues. I am speaking in general about an approach to manage the environmental issues, which I argue is consistent with the motion before the Chair.

The PRESIDENT — Order! It is up to the member moving the motion to support the motion in the way he thinks best. It is unrealistic to say that using a certain form of words — for example a reference to bats — should be out of context with any debate on the environment. I do not uphold the point of order.

Hon. P. R. HALL — The point I was making is that when there is an environmental problem in Melbourne too quickly the solution to the problem is to pass it over to the people living in country Victoria. I gave the examples of the bats in the botanic gardens where the first response was to transport them to Mallacoota in

East Gippsland. I understand that has now been put to one side because the first-class travel costs of the bats to Mallacoota is \$400 per bat. That solution was too costly so it has been shelved.

The National Party supports the appropriate and responsible management of both public and private land. The National Party and its supporters support the Landcare program. That is a real example of how people in rural constituencies care for the environment both on private and public land. Our constituents are neighbours of public land and they want the government to be good managers of public land, but responsible management is more than opportunistic window-dressing. It involves the allocation of dollars and a greater effort at the ground level. Doing non-sexy stuff like appointing efficient dog trappers and weed control coordinators and instituting a proper program for controlled burning are important. Governments do not get many pats on the back for employing a few extra dog trappers and putting in place a program to control corellas in different parts of Victoria. Although those issues are non-sexy those programs are needed to address environmental issues.

The National Party is proud of its record on the environment. Its stand is responsible, practical and is one that it feels passionately about. The National Party makes no excuses for boring other members of this place by raising incessantly issues such as the control of weeds, corellas and rabbits, the appointment of dog trappers, access to public land, water rights, controlled burning and so on. The National Party will talk about those things all day because they are important.

I remember talking in this place about ragwort and some members of the Labor Party could only giggle because many of them had never heard of it. There is now a growing appreciation of the need to look after and put resources into controlling noxious weeds. Members of the National Party will talk about these non-sexy issues every day this Parliament sits because they are the real issues that are important in looking after the environment. The National Party is concerned about the environment which is why it will continue to push these issues.

I have outlined the general approach to environmental issues from the National Party's point of view. I now turn to specific issues relating to the marine environment. I will give honourable members five reasons why the National Party opposes the prohibition of recreation and commercial fishing in the nominated marine national parks and sanctuaries as proposed in the report of the Environment Conservation Council. I pose the question: will the prohibition of fishing

achieve better marine and environmental outcomes? The National Party says the answer to the question is not necessarily so. Further, the answer is an emphatic no if that is done in isolation. If no other action is taken apart from the banning of commercial and recreational fishing the desired outcome of improving the marine environment will not be achieved.

The National Party argues that all Victorian waters should be managed at a level that ensures long-term sustainability. Recommendation 12 on page 23 of the ECC report goes to that issue. It talks about establishing all other waters apart from those nominated for particular classifications as coastal waters reserves and states that appropriate management needs to be put in place for those coastal waters reserves. The National Party has no disagreement with that notion of having appropriate management plans for all Victorian waters. All Victorian waters should be managed appropriately. The National Party does not agree that particular areas should be specified to be managed differently from other Victorian waters. They should be managed according to their needs.

The National Party argues strongly that activities other than fishing impact severely on the marine environment. I mentioned many of them when I spoke about the National Party's general approach to environmental issues. Land-based run-off and pollution have a major impact on the marine environment. The accidental introduction of exotic organisms has the potential to impact hugely on the marine environment. The introduction of starfish to Port Phillip Bay is an example of that. The physical destruction of marine habitat can also have a long-term impact on the marine environment.

Perhaps the most catastrophic events that can cause devastation to marine environments are the oil spills that we see often on television. The National Party argues that poorly managed unsustainable fisheries also have a huge impact on the marine environment. The National Party argues that all of those things should be properly managed in a sustainable way because they significantly impact on the marine environment.

Many experts agree with me. Claire Miller wrote an article in the *Age* of 16 January about this issue. I do not want to be accused of misinterpreting her views on marine parks because she supports them. She states in part:

... like all native terrestrial ecosystems, it is under pressure from a cocktail of human-induced threats: population growth, coastal development, competition from exotic species, fishing and the effects of polluted run-off from cities, towns and farms.

She agrees with what the National Party is saying this morning — that is, there is a cocktail, a whole mix of things that impact on the marine environment. The National Party does not support the simplistic solution of banning recreational and professional fishing as the answer to the problem.

The *Age* of 10 February included some good articles about the killing of the Gippsland Lakes and the catastrophic event in early February, when there was the unexplained death of many tens of thousands of fish that were washed up on the shores of the lakes. I still do not know if we have a full explanation of that, but it was not fishing that created that problem; it was some other environmental or natural catastrophic event. It is an example of how matters other than recreational or commercial fishing impact on our marine environment. As I said, the National Party argues that not just a simplistic approach should be taken to such issues.

At certain points in Port Phillip Bay and other fishing areas along the coast there are dangerous levels of *E. coli*; in certain waterways there are problems with blue-green algae; and at times there are catastrophic events such as oil spills that impact on the marine environment. All those things are part of the total mix, and if we are to address the marine environment in a sincere and responsible way we must encompass all those issues.

Recently I had some correspondence from Rod Crowther, a professional fisherman who was also appointed to the Fisheries Co-management Council. He made some telling comments on the point I am making. In his email of 14 March he said:

Think about this: a marine park will not protect any of the hundreds of non-target species, nor the handful of sedentary targeted species, from threats to biodiversity and wellbeing because the true threats are being overlooked or placed in the too-hard basket.

A marine park will not stop the very real identified threats of toxic and chemical land degradation and run-off. A park will not control estuary water quality and quantity, it will not prevent the introduction or control of exotic species, it will not eliminate resource theft (in fact may enhance resource theft) and a park will not protect from major shipping disasters.

That last point is quite right. His comments are further evidence that an amalgam of events must be considered in looking after our marine environment.

Does the Environment Conservation Council report address those matters? It does in part in recommendations 15 to 19 at page 25. For example, recommendation 15 is:

Catchment management authorities and boards ensure that reviews of regional catchment strategies specifically address the impacts of land use and management on the marine and estuarine environment, particularly where important physical or biological features may be affected.

That is basically all it says — that is, one page of the report suggests that catchment management authorities should look at establishing ways to address the impact of land use on our marine environment. That is not good enough. That is an opening comment about the need to do it, but we want a real commitment by the government to addressing the real problems that are impacting on our marine environment. Such recommendations have been glossed over. The whole focus of the report has been on establishing marine parks and sanctuary areas and little regard has been paid to the associated issues that impact to a greater extent on our marine environment.

I said I would give five reasons why the National Party does not support the prohibition of recreational and commercial fishing as proposed by the ECC report. The second reason is that the National Party does not believe there is evidence from any experience of no-take zones to support the contention that they will improve environmental outcomes. We simply do not know whether the creation of marine parks or sanctuaries in Victoria will lead to better environmental outcomes — because until now no-one has considered it worthy of a study.

Currently Victoria has three marine no-take areas: Pope's Eye and Point Cook marine reserves in Port Phillip Bay and Bunurong Marine Park, which is situated along the South Gippsland coast. No study has ever been undertaken to determine the impact of no-take areas on those reserves. That is appalling. The report recommends that we lock up another 24 areas that will impact greatly on people's livelihoods and the economy of coastal communities when we have not done even any baseline studies on whether that will result in improved environmental outcomes.

Why have studies not been undertaken on Bunurong, Pope's Eye or Point Cook marine reserves? I do not know. However, if I were in government now — or indeed nine years ago when the recommendation was first given to the then Land Conservation Council — the first thing I would have commissioned would have been some scientific research to determine whether there are any benefits from such a proposal. The only evidence lobbyists point to is from overseas experience. However, we cannot automatically extrapolate that overseas experience and say that it will be replicated in Victoria. Are our waters identical? Are the pollution factors identical? We do not know about any of those

issues. It seems imperative that, before embarking on establishing significant marine parks in Victoria, scientific research should be undertaken. As I said, we simply do not know.

Again I refer to the recommendations, specifically recommendation 13 on page 24 of the report, which is really an admission by the ECC that such work has not been done. It states:

Further research be undertaken on biological community composition and structure, both within and external to marine protected areas, with an emphasis on assessing the impacts of harvesting marine fauna.

So it says that nothing has been done to date; perhaps we had better start doing it. The National Party is happy to have the research undertaken. I argued for that on behalf of the National Party in the submission I made to the inquiry. We argued very strongly that the research needs to be undertaken, and we even said that we would be happy for a few more small areas to be set aside for scientific study purposes. We already have three in Victoria, and we would be happy to have two or three more areas set aside so that proper scientific research can be undertaken. But we are certainly not happy to take away significant areas of productive fishing for both commercial and recreational purposes when no scientific study has been undertaken to prove there would be environmental benefits.

The third reason that the National Party opposes the prohibition on recreational fishing as proposed by the ECC is the impact it will have on local economies. The legislation that established the ECC provides that the council is required to take into consideration the social and economic impact of its recommendations. The most scathing criticism of the ECC report was that the inquiry was not undertaken with anything like the rigour required. People in our communities say that the economic impact estimated by the ECC is way off the mark and nowhere near the reality.

Honourable members have seen what happens when there is a lack of rigour in the assessment of issues associated with the environment, the most recent example being the regional forest agreements that have been signed off in Victoria in the past two or three years. What has come to light now is that there has been a gross overestimate of the sustainable resources, which means that in reality there is now less timber available for the timber industry. That is because the economic impact study was not rigorous enough in its approach. The economic impact assessment undertaken by the ECC has been undertaken with nowhere near the level of rigour required for us to have any confidence in its accuracy.

People from Corner Inlet and Wilsons Promontory have made an assessment of what they believe will be the economic impact on their community. The South Gippsland Marine Park Action Group put together a report and said about the economic impact that:

Collectively trawl, rock lobster, bays and inlet, abalone and wrasse fisheries, will forgo in excess of \$4 000 000 annually if these fisheries are excluded from these two proposed marine national parks.

That dollar figure does not sound like a lot, but when we are talking about jobs in the local community it probably means at least 20 jobs in the Corner Inlet area. That means probably 15 to 20 families will no longer have employment and another 20 or 30 children who now attend the local school may no longer live there so it has that longer term impact. If recreational fishing is banned from communities like Port Welshpool or Bemm River in East Gippsland they will die because they are recreational fishing spots along the Victorian coast in areas close to proposed marine parks.

The National Party believes that the rigour applied to the economic impact assessment has been grossly insufficient. The impact has been underestimated — it will be immense. The abalone cooperative in Mallacoota has told me that if it loses 20 per cent of its annual catch it will probably be forced to close and merge with another processing facility in Melbourne. The cooperative is the biggest employer in Mallacoota and if it closes another 30 jobs will be lost. There is a fishing cooperative in the Western District at Apollo Bay. It suggests that if these recommendations go through in their current form it will be forced to close.

As I said, the potential economic impact on small communities is immense. The National Party maintains that the social impact has not been taken into consideration either. I can recall attending a public meeting in Cann River 18 months ago when the ECC held a series of meetings. A person from Cann River spoke very passionately about the issue. He said that they did not have much to do in Cann River; they do not have a picture theatre or even a footy team. They do not have recreational facilities for their kids and their backyard is the sea, the local marine environment, where people go down to do a bit of fishing and diving. He said that the ECC was proposing to stop them from doing that and that would deny them their only local recreational opportunities. I was impressed by that. It is what I term the social impact of these recommendations. I do not believe that that has been given due consideration in this report.

The fourth reason the National Party opposes the prohibition of recreational and commercial fishing in

the designated areas is that there are already available appropriate mechanisms to deal with the sustainability of the fishing industry. As I said, every professional fisherman realises that they cannot take everything they would want to take and that they cannot fish every day and every night. The fishermen have imposed disciplines on themselves to ensure that their fisheries are sustainable and there are jobs for their children in the future.

I pay full tribute to people like Rex Hunt who have encouraged recreational fishermen to throw back the small fish and even big fish at times if they are breeding fish. Rex Hunt encourages fishermen to give the fish a kiss and say goodbye and good luck as they have had their fun and maybe someone else will catch that fish in the future. That sort of responsible attitude is more evident in both professional and recreational fishermen these days because we understand that we want to be able to fish next year and the year after and we want our kids to be able to fish in 10 years time.

Fishery management plans are in place for most fisheries in Victoria, and the National Party is very supportive of them. They are the appropriate mechanisms to ensure that particular fisheries are sustainable. The National Party supports the imposition of conditions on fishing licences. It supports having defined seasons for particular types of fishing. It supports restrictions like minimum size, bag limits, pot drops and all the rest. The National Party supports those sort of conditions being placed on fisheries to ensure that they are sustainable.

I refer again to the email I received from Rod Crowther some days ago. He made another comment that I thought was worth mentioning when he said:

It could be interpreted that the whole state is already a marine park and that access to the park is via the current system of licensing. In other words, all species are protected unless you have a commercial or recreational licence to utilise a species in accordance with the relevant management plans (which may include no take) and the rules and regulations of the day. These are set down in the Fisheries Act 1995, along with fisheries regulations, and must take into account the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

He is quite right. If the government wished to consider the issue of fisheries alone the National Party would say that there are ample mechanisms in place to ensure that every fishery in Victoria is sustainable.

The fifth and final reason the National Party opposes the prohibition of recreational and commercial fishing is that it was never mandated by government that this would happen. The terms of reference for this inquiry ask the Environment Conservation Council to look at:

a preferred approach and priorities for the progressive establishment of a representative system of marine parks in the State of Victoria ...

It also refers to aquaculture zones. The terms of reference refer to the progressive establishment of a system of marine parks; they do not state that we have to have 24 lobbed on us all at once!

As I said, the National Party is happy to look at a few areas for scientific research. However, before imposing large-scale marine parks in prime fishing areas along the Victorian coast we must make sure that they work and that they will produce the environmental benefits we would all like to see. The terms of reference do not even state that marine parks need to be no-take areas. They do not mention that at all — that is a decision the ECC has put forward.

Schedule 4 of the National Parks Act 1975 shows that Victoria already has marine parks. It has the Wilsons Promontory Marine Reserve, the Wilsons Promontory Marine Park, the Shallow Inlet Marine and Coastal Park, the Corner Inlet Marine and Coastal Park and the Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park. Victoria's marine parks are not no-take areas; they have management plans like all park areas and in some areas there may be no-take zones or restrictions on commercial and recreational fishing. However, we can have marine parks that do not necessarily automatically prohibit recreational and commercial fishing. The National Parks Act has mechanisms to establish marine reserves or parks but that does not necessarily imply that recreational and commercial fishing should be prohibited in all of them.

Those are the five reasons for the National Party's rejection of the recommendations of the ECC insofar as they would prohibit recreational and commercial fishing in those 24 nominated areas along the Victorian coast. However, it is important for me to outline what the National Party would support. The National Party would support the things I put in the submission the National Party made to this inquiry. I said that:

We would support:

- greater research to establish a better understanding of our marine environment;
- a greater management focus on all Victorian waters;
- efforts that reduce the impact of land-based activities on the marine environment;
- the creation of 2 or 3 small scientific research areas from which baseline scientific study can be undertaken;
- the facilitation of aquaculture areas at appropriate places within Victorian waters.

The National Party is not totally negative on this issue. It is most concerned that this government will pick up the recommendations of the ECC report and do some simplistic window-dressing.

My greatest fear is that the government will simply create marine national parks for the sake of creating them, not to put in place the non-sexy stuff — a term I used earlier — that is needed to address environmental problems in Victoria. The National Party is most concerned that the government will undertake simplistic window-dressing. It will be easy for the government to say, 'We have created a marine national park to stop people from engaging in recreational or commercial fishing in those areas, and that's that!'. It adopted the same attitude with some land-based parks when it said, 'We will declare a land area as a national park, and do nothing else'. That attitude would be almost environmental vandalism.

The government cannot expect the support of the National Party if it introduces legislation that aims to establish areas of marine parks and sanctuaries in Victoria if it also says, 'The conditions applying will include a prohibition of recreational and commercial fishing'. The National Party is not into that. The National Party's approach to environmental issues is practical and responsible. Our environment is more about how we manage rather than how we label the land. Management of the environment is the key, whether it relates to land or marine bases. The National Party is always happy to support responsible management, but it will not support an irresponsible labelling of certain areas.

I could canvass many more issues raised by my constituents and by people who made submissions to the ECC inquiry. That could happen later if definitive legislation on the report were to be introduced. The National Party looks forward to hearing the government's response to the report, which I hope will be forthcoming shortly. There is much anxiety among residents of coastal areas in country Victoria about how the government will respond. I encourage the government to put forward a response, be it good or bad, because at least knowing what the government proposes will ease to some degree the anxiety of people awaiting the government's response to the report.

In conclusion, I repeat that the government cannot expect the support of the National Party if it puts forward recommendations to create marine national parks in which recreational and commercial fishing is prohibited. Other issues have a greater impact on the marine environment than fishing, and those issues need to be addressed by the government. If the government

is willing to commit to addressing issues affecting the marine environment it can expect responsible and serious consideration by the National Party of any further proposals.

Earlier I listed what the National Party would support. It has adopted a responsible approach, but it would oppose the sort of simplistic window-dressing that is all too evident when governments wish to appease environmental groups. The National Party stands by its record on environmental issues, as I have explained. I look forward to the government's response to the report. I urge honourable members to support the motion.

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) — The government rejects the motion. However, I welcome a number of statements made by the Honourable Peter Hall, particularly his statement that the National Party is concerned about the state of the marine environment and that it supports at least parts of the report of the Environment Conservation Council (ECC) report and recommendations. I also welcome Mr Hall's statement that all Victorian waters should be managed to ensure sustainability and that Victoria's fisheries should be managed sustainably.

Given the state of the parties in this house and the unwillingness, at least in the foreseeable future, of the Liberal and National parties to support any reforms or changes to the composition of this house, the achievement of a sensible outcome in response to the ECC report is dependent on the position adopted by the opposition parties.

As the Honourable Peter Hall has said, the government is yet to make a decision and to respond to the ECC's *Marine, Coastal and Estuarine Investigation* final report. It will do so when it has completed its careful consideration of all the ECC's recommendations. I am sure the Leader of the National Party wishes that in my contribution to the debate I would give, at least in part, the government's response to the report. That will not happen. The reply will be given later.

Prior to making its decision in response to the ECC's final report the government has been meeting with a wide range of key stakeholders. To date, and following the presentation of the final report to the government, meetings have been held with, to name but a few, Seafood Industry Victoria, VRFish, Rex Hunt's Futurefish Foundation, the Victorian National Parks Association, the Fisheries Co-management Council, the Victorian Aquaculture Council, the Victorian Fishing Charter Association, the Australian Marine Sciences

Association, the Dive Industry Victoria Association and the Marine and Coastal Community Network.

Hon. E. G. Stoney — No local stakeholders.

Hon. C. C. BROAD — I will get to that. However, I stress that the government is not intending to replicate the ECC's consultations that occurred prior to its making the final report that has now been presented to the government. After all, the final report of the ECC represents the culmination of about nine years work traversing the lives of three governments, having been commenced in 1991 by the then Land Conservation Council. During that time the council engaged in extensive local community consultation and invited community participation in its work.

In addition to the peak bodies, government ministers — particularly the Minister for Environment and Conservation in the other place and I — have met with and continue to meet with different groups. The consultations are not yet complete. A number of ministers have participated in a series of meetings throughout Victoria. Meetings have been held with local community representatives, including representatives from recreational and commercial fishing interests, in — to name but a few locations — Portland, San Remo, Geelong and around Wilsons Promontory. Those local consultations are ongoing wherever it is or has been possible to include them in the work of ministers.

The consultations conducted by the ECC included numerous specially commissioned reports; some six formal periods of public comment; probably hundreds of meetings — although I do not have an accurate figure — over the period allowed for public comment with large and small interest groups and individuals; an inspection by the ECC of every recommended area; and the receipt of more than 4500 written submissions and letters. Ministers and members of this house have received many submissions and letters in addition to those received by the ECC.

On the issue of consultation — I shall anticipate an argument flagged in the house last night — in addition to the ongoing consultations by ministers and the ECC in the past nine years, as I have already described them, I strongly indicate the government's commitment to consultation. I stand strongly on the government's record in that area.

It was one of the four pillars of Labor Party policy leading up to the last state election. That commitment to strengthening democracy and increasing accountability is an important hallmark of the government. Leadership

is ultimately not only about consultation but about acting decisively and responsibly following consultation and possessing the character to do what is right. It is not about procrastination.

Given the extensive consultations to date, the government will be making decisions in the near future on these matters. We do not intend to embark on further consultation seeking to replicate what has gone before. It is time that decisions are made on these matters and that there is some certainty, in particular for commercial fishing and recreational fishing interests, rather than having the matter drag on incessantly.

I turn now to matters of substance and the substantive issues involved in making this decision. I refer opposition members to Victoria's biodiversity strategy, signed off by the previous government in 1997, which identified the marine environment as a gap in Victoria's reserve system and included an explicit commitment to establish a comprehensive, adequate and representative system for marine protected areas.

The former government replaced the Land Conservation Council with the Environment Conservation Council and gave it a revised set of terms of reference to complete the investigation commenced by the LCC. It is worth reflecting on the terms of reference given to the ECC by the previous government. It was to make recommendations on the protection of significant environmental values and the sustainable use of those areas with priority given, firstly, to a preferred approach and priorities for the progressive establishment of a representative system of marine parks in Victoria and, secondly, to areas suitable for marine aquaculture which can be developed on an environmentally sound basis.

The Bracks government on its election to government was pleased to support the continuation of that investigation under the terms of reference provided by the previous government. The Labor Party's election policy on natural assets outlined clearly its commitment to creating a comprehensive, adequate and representative network of marine national parks and reserves, including the establishment of a marine national park in Port Phillip Bay.

The Bracks government also outlined a commitment to support aquaculture initiatives provided they are subject to environmental assessment and preferably located in enclosed onshore sites. The Minister for Environment and Conservation reiterated her commitment when tabling the ECC final report in the Legislative Assembly in October last year.

In considering these matters we should also examine the situation at the national level. The goal of a national representative system of marine protected areas, which was signed off by all Australian governments in 1999, is to establish a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of marine protected areas to contribute to the long-term ecological viability of marine and estuarine systems to maintain ecological processes and systems and to protect biological diversity at all levels.

In addition to that signing off by all governments, under the oceans policy the commonwealth government is committed to accelerating the development of the national representative system of marine protected areas. It has said it is essential that it be established as quickly as possible for both conservation purposes and to give regional security for industry access to ocean resources. I note that the federal National Party has supported the oceans policy. I remind the house that the federal member for Gippsland, Peter McGauran, is a minister in the federal government. However, the stance of the state division of the National Party on these issues is unclear.

The Minister for Environment and Conservation and I have received a broad level of input from those who support the recommendations of the ECC and from those who have concerns about them. I am aware from representations made to me that some local communities are fearful that potential impacts on local fishing industries, local recreational fishing and fishing-related tourism may be undesirable. It is also important to note that just as many are supportive of the proposals for marine national parks, seeing them as future assets for their regions and for all Victorians.

Since the release of the final report last year a number of local councils have considered the recommendations relating to their areas and have expressed their support. They include the Surf Coast Shire, the Moyne Shire Council, the Cardinia Shire Council, the Greater Geelong City Council and the Hobsons Bay City Council. A number, as one would expect, support the recommendations in principle but have issues they would like the government to address before making its final decision. The South Gippsland Shire Council is one example.

In preparing its final report the ECC commissioned a number of independent assessments of the potential economic impact of its recommendations on the fishing industry and on local communities. One would expect that such assessments would be the subject of debate and interpretation. The assessments concluded that impacts on commercial fishers included job losses at

about 0.3 per cent of all employment in adjacent local communities, with incomes expected to be reduced rather than actual jobs lost.

The net effect on the economies of coastal towns was assessed as not being significant. Importantly, the independent assessments also noted that the development of aquaculture, which is another important component of the recommendations, offers economic and social benefits in the form of new industry activity with the associated opportunity for employment generation. In particular we noted that if only one commercial operation went ahead in an area such as Portland, that could potentially generate 100 direct jobs and 250 indirect jobs. I have visited in the Portland area one example of an extremely impressive investment in abalone aquaculture, and the income and employment that that is already generating and has the potential to generate is certainly welcome.

The assessments concluded that although enhanced tourism is unlikely to result in significant benefits in the short term, it is likely to result in long-term benefits including job creation and income for surrounding communities. That has certainly been recognised in some of the submissions to government and in the enhanced marketing of sites as tourism destinations because of their proximity to marine national parks and sanctuaries, leading to increased overall visitor demand, which of course will have to be carefully managed.

We have heard much in some submissions — and they have been alluded to today — about the alleged lack of science behind the ECC's recommendations. I refer the house to the recent statement by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, signed by 150 of the world's leading marine scientists, declaring that in its view there is now compelling scientific evidence that marine reserves conserve both biodiversity and fisheries and will help to replenish the oceans. I understand that a number of Australia's leading marine scientists and the Australian Marine Sciences Association also endorse that statement.

An article on page 91 of the February edition of the *Economist* discusses the matter in some detail. It refers to St Lucia where a third of the country's fishing grounds were designated as no-take areas in 1995 and within three years commercially important fish stocks doubled in seas adjacent to the reserves. There is a great deal of information in the article which I commend to honourable members.

Hon. P. R. Hall — Is any research being done in Victoria?

Hon. C. C. BROAD — I commend honourable members to that article and to the ECC's reports.

It is important to point out that the fishing industry has not rejected the ECC's reports outright. It has consistently supported the need for improved management of the marine environment, and the industry along with other stakeholders is working constructively with government in assisting government to develop its response. Both Seafood Industry Victoria and VRFish as the peak commercial and recreational fishing organisations in Victoria have indicated clearly in their representations that they are not opposed outright to the ECC's recommendations. We certainly welcome the input from both peak bodies in assisting the government in coming to a decision.

In conclusion, I indicate on behalf of the government that our marine heritage is very important and valuable as are our commercial and recreational fisheries. The government's final decision on the ECC's recommendations will reflect careful consideration, given the interests of the many stakeholders at local and state levels and the interests of the wider Victorian community. I urge members of the opposition parties to similarly give careful consideration to all of those matters in coming to their final position when the government makes its response and legislation is introduced into Parliament.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — The motion clearly gives expression to the sense of frustration that many small rural coastal communities feel — particularly communities that are highly dependent on recreational and commercial fishing activity — about the impact of the recommendations by the Environment Conservation Council (ECC) which they perceive as having a significantly detrimental effect on their economic and social viability.

Although the minister took the opportunity today — which she refused to do last night during the adjournment debate — to respond to the issue I raised concerning the establishment of a stakeholder process, I point out that the issue will not go away. The communities affected by the proposals being considered by government as a consequence of the ECC investigation are concerned that they have no access to government processes to have their views considered.

I note that the chairman of the Environment Conservation Council is taking a close interest in this debate. Let me put on the record that I understand the difficult nature of the investigation which the ECC has completed. However, so far as I am concerned the ECC

has now completed its work. While naturally the ECC members and staff will take a keen interest in developments as the political process deals with the issues arising from the report, this is now clearly a matter of simple straightforward governance and politics. The work has been done by the ECC and it is now up to government to deal with it.

Having said that, I should perhaps give honourable members a perspective on the amount of work that has been involved. I have with me today a few of the documents for the purpose of helping honourable members to understand the issue. The original reference was given by the former Kirner government to the Land Conservation Council (LCC) in 1991. The first report I am aware of was the descriptive report which was produced in 1993 — a voluminous tome substantially supported by other working documents which may be seen as representative of some of the work that went on in the background.

Further, a draft final recommendation was proposed in 1996 by the LCC, which was subsequently subsumed by the Environment Conservation Council, and an interim report was released in 1998.

Further to that, a draft report for public comment was released in December 1999 by the ECC, and then considered. Finally the *Marine, Coastal and Estuarine Investigation* final report was released in August 2000. There is an approximate width of 10 centimetres of paper just in these tomes. However, they are only the tip of the iceberg in the work that has gone on over nine and a half years to produce outcomes.

It must be understood that through that inquiry the various versions of recommendations that have been proposed have been amended, and indeed in some cases substantially reconsidered and reviewed as a result of further information and further consideration. As a consequence I suggest that the final report contains a set of recommendations that are relevant for the time they were considered by and agreed to by the ECC, but which in the light of new information may cease to be what is the most sensible way of approaching the resolution of the protection of the marine environment.

To put that in a general context I refer to a submission from Rod Crowther, a long-term member of the Fisheries Co-Management Council. He is a well-regarded professional fisherman who is active in the industry and who is recognised by both the previous and current governments as having expertise. He was appointed by both governments to the Fisheries Co-Management Council. In the submission to me, which I received last week, Mr Crowther states:

It could be interpreted that the whole state is already a marine park and that access to the park is via the current system of licensing. In other words, all species are protected unless you have a commercial or recreational licence to utilise a species in accordance with the relevant management plans (which may include no-take) and the rules and regulations of the day.

Mr Crowther goes on to describe how they must be determined under the Fisheries Act and regulations.

The essential point Mr Crowther raises is that this is done with regard to the principles of ecologically sustainable development. I do not believe any honourable member would wish to see government act in a way that ignores the importance of protecting the environment in any sense. However, there exists a need to recognise the rights, concerns, fears and opportunities of people who live in communities dependent on the marine environment.

A current problem is the reality of a political process running to develop an outcome and involving political judgments about the resolution of a marine investigation without the government considering the aspirations of small communities. I acknowledge, as I did last evening, that it is clear that the government is in discussion with peak bodies, and quite properly so; it would be roundly criticised if it were not. However, peak bodies do not have a mortgage on knowledge. Many people have a lifetime of experience, indeed generations of experience, with regard to particular areas of Victoria's coast where there has been a family tradition of commercial activity or recreational fishing activity. Those people have knowledge that is relevant and could be useful to the government in its considerations.

I reiterate the importance of those people, notwithstanding the 4500 written submissions to the LCC and ECC over nine and a half years, and notwithstanding the substantial body of reports or memoranda of public meetings that have occurred, some of which I have been involved in. I chaired a meeting at Orbost in March 1999, which was character building. I spoke at a meeting at Marlo in January 1999 year which was even more character building given that 500 people attended the Marlo hotel, which has a general capacity for approximately 50 people. There are many instances of large meetings taking place where the ECC representatives, be they council members or members of staff, have raised issues. However, wherever I go, whether it is Portland, Apollo Bay, Corner Inlet or Mallacoota, the same story that comes back to me from people whose futures are at stake, not just their livelihoods but their futures and their way of life and that of their children, is that they feel threatened

by the process currently in train. Their parents have handed on to them a tradition.

I do not believe the government can possibly ignore the concerns being deeply expressed by those people. For the minister to come into the house, as she has just done, and suggest it is time to lead and forget about consultation — —

Hon. C. C. Broad — I did not say that; that is a misrepresentation.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — You might say that, but clearly the minister has no intention of establishing a process that will involve those people at Portland, Apollo Bay or Corner Inlet in consideration of the submissions they wish to put to government. These people have invested huge amounts of personal resources that come from their own earnings from the activities in which they are involved, and they are not only commercial or recreational fishermen, they are people who operate caravan parks and motels and those who are totally dependent on the activities associated with that coastal involvement.

I have but a handful of submissions that go to being opposed to marine parks and no-take zones. The view is consistent: there are concerns about particular recommendations and the impact on the small communities that will be affected. The earnest belief is that the recommendations from the ECC are not presented in such a way as to deliver the best outcome because there was insufficient application of local detail acknowledged. That is a fact of life and it is undeniable that that is the view of those communities and the individuals directly impacted upon.

I do not believe it is possible for the government to proceed to implement the recommendations of the ECC and make a policy decision without taking into consideration the submissions that people have put together. It is evident that we need to put into context what that expectation might be. For example, in a letter from the Minister for Environment and Conservation dated 1 December 2000, the issue that had been raised with her by VRFish, the peak recreational fishing organisation, was responding to stakeholder consultation.

The minister clearly indicated that there would be stakeholder consultation. The reference states:

My colleague the Minister for Energy and Resources and I are currently developing a consultation program for key stakeholders in order to finalise the government's response.

That is terrific if you happen to be the chairman or director of VRFish or SIV or one of the other peak bodies. But if you happen to be a licensee operating what has been a traditional fishing harvesting activity for a long time in a sustainable way in a place like Port Franklin, Port Welshpool or Port Albert, what rights do you have to get access to the minister? The answer is none. The fact of the matter is the minister will not meet with these people. We need to put into context how important the activity of fishing is to the state. Varying assessments of the value of recreational fishing to Victoria have been made, but the last comprehensive study done for Fisheries Victoria was in July 1997. In the report entitled *Economic Impact of Recreational Fishing in Victoria* a summary of the study results indicate that in the past year \$1.037 billion was spent on recreational fishing activities in Victoria.

We know what that effect is in an aggregate sense. What we do not tend to understand is the finely balanced economic viability of these small communities. It could be attested that in any industry a marginal cost issue or a marginal turnover issue creates viability. If a proportion of a resource is removed from an industry and therefore the total volume of resource available for exploitation in a commercial sense is reduced, inevitably there will be an impact on viability, not just at an aggregate level, but in the way it affects local communities.

If it means, for example, that as a result of the ECC recommendations as they stand, four or five licensees were proposed to be taken out of Corner Inlet it is not about the government creating a process to retire some licences; the reality is that economic activity will be diminished. The net result will be an adverse impact on that community in total — not just the fishermen's families, but indeed the very people who depend on the multiplier effect of that natural resource activity.

We know as a general rule of thumb that for every dollar of productivity or production in natural resource activities, there is a multiplier of about three. In areas such as I have described — little fishing towns that have a higher sensitivity to the level of either recreational or commercial activity — a deliberate strategy or approach by government will have an impact on the whole community. These towns sometimes have some vulnerability about numbers of children enrolled in schools, for example, and therefore a reduction in the number of fishing families may not just be the licensees; it could involve the deckhands who would otherwise be employed as well. It could involve those people involved in transport and processing and it could also involve the people whose

very livelihoods depend on the multiplier effect I have alluded to through the wider community.

So the minister has a larger responsibility than just coming to a decision. Judging by the minister's comments today she has no desire to consult at all with those local communities. I am not suggesting that the minister should, if she does not feel disposed to, bother herself to have those consultations in person. However, I suggest she needs to establish a process within the government by which those consultations occur because at this time those local, rural, regional, coastal communities feel absolutely disenfranchised.

One of the other issues highlighted to me — I have to own up to some ignorance — is that many positive reports have been received about marine parks being developed in New Zealand. I took it in good faith that the New Zealand situation was analogous to what was being proposed in Victoria until by chance I was reading some of the background material provided to me by Professor Bill Ballantyne, who is a great advocate of the New Zealand model. I discovered very much to my surprise that notwithstanding the advocacy and aspirations of New Zealand, the Victorian proposals are very much more ambitious than the New Zealand model. I found that the size of the parks proposed for Victoria and the size of the no-take zones are substantially larger and therefore will have a much greater impact in Victorian coastal waters than the parks in place in New Zealand.

To use a simple analogy, the size of most of the parks in New Zealand are about the same area as a typical Victorian farm in terms of land area. However, at Corner Inlet, for example, which is comparable to a sheep station and is a very large body of water comprising the equivalent of 4500 hectares, a significant impact would be felt. To take it further, because of the inlet's estuarine nature — that is, the water levels regularly rise and fall significantly — an additional area of at least that size will become unapproachable because of navigation difficulties and the lack of access to a navigable channel.

Therefore, although acknowledging the importance of the work done by the LCC and ECC in developing a basis for government to consider proposals, that work is incomplete because it lacks local input and that is relevant to this debate. A number of organisations that would regard themselves as peak organisations have made further submissions and representations to the opposition, and I have no doubt they are doing so to the government. Not all the views expressed by peak organisations are entirely consistent with their cohorts.

For example, the Game Fishing Association of Victoria, which is a member of VRFish, states:

The association and its member anglers are most concerned about the imposition of no-fishing zones as part of the ECC report on marine parks. The GFAV supports the establishment of marine parks for multiple use, including recreational angling.

Different views exist about how marine parks should be approached and there are a number of ways in which marine parks can be managed. There is a general tenor of support for multiple-use parks, and I would have to say there is clearly, among many significant stakeholders, including professional fishermen, an acceptance that there will be some form of no-take zones.

The argument is not about the principle today; the argument in the community is how best to implement that process. Honourable members would be aware that Seafood Industry Victoria has made a submission to the government which effectively supports the principle on behalf of its constituent members. The submission has been framed after arduous statewide consultation on a port-by-port basis, not just with professional fishermen but with recreational anglers, local tourism interests and others. It states that the total no-take zones be half that proposed in the current marine park proposals by the Environment Conservation Council, but that the total area of multiple use be expanded.

The net result of the Seafood Industry proposal is 3 per cent of no-take zones and a total of 8.5 per cent of parks. That submission is worth reading. Not only does it make revised suggestions to government but it delineates carefully what may achieve significant benefits to the government in achieving an outcome. VRFish, the peak recreational body, as recently as last week, indicated strongly:

There are some areas where we opposed a no-take and others that require some changes. VRFish has not agreed to the final report by the ECC, has not supported the introduction of marine parks and it is incorrect to suggest that we have.

It has been widely represented in the community that VRFish has endorsed the ECC report verbatim, and clearly that is wrong. The letter further states:

We encourage the government to continue to continue to consult with the peak organisations and to address the real concerns expressed about the implementation of national marine parks and no-take zones and the necessary management plans that will need to be agreed on before the parks can be established.

Having said that again they seem to be falling into the trap, as has the government, of considering that

consultation involves only peak bodies. Clearly for satisfactory consultation to be concluded in a way that the community feels some ownership of the outcome achieved by government depends entirely on a sense of participation. As a consequence of the way the Minister for Environment and Conservation is dealing with the issue many people feel disenfranchised.

I should refer to some of the submissions that have come my way. I use these as a representative example. An alternative proposal in relation to Cape Bridgewater and Discovery Bay has come from community interests in Portland. Those interests include the Portland Angling Club, the Portland Professional Fishermen's Association, the Western Zone Wrasse Fishermen's Association and the Western Abalone Divers Association. This submission is not an attempt to debunk the ECC's report, but a serious attempt by a community to come together and shed some light on the issue from a community perspective on what has been proposed and the impact it may have.

I have received a letter from the Colac Otway Shire which expresses concern about the impacts on Apollo Bay. The letter states:

Our concern centres on the social and economic impact on the Apollo Bay community, should the ECC's proposal be adopted.

Jobs will be lost in the town and the fishermen's cooperative, operated since 1950, will be forced to close. Infrastructure costs to the remaining commercial fishers will rise and licensee property rights will be devalued.

This is not just the submission from Apollo Bay fishermen, but a submission endorsed by the municipality in that area. It is a substantive expression of view of the community.

I have read comments in the press and from various organisations. The honorary secretary of the Australian Recreational Fishing Alliance, Horst Pfeifer, is an articulate spokesman for that organisation and he claims:

There is no scientific evidence to show the small number of fish caught by recreational fishermen damages the ecosystem. The damage done at places like Bells Beach where hundreds of surfers walk across reefs and sand bars is far greater and they're not being banned.

We have this dilemma in the debate where many anglers perceive that they will be restricted from traditional fishing areas simply for the purpose of achieving a no-take zone where the activity they participate in has little effect on that environment. It is an idea that some people in the public gallery would not agree with, but it is a view strongly shared by anglers

and many of the submissions I have read reflect that view. It would be appropriate for the government to have a process whereby those views can be considered.

I have received a submission from the Cape Woolamai Progress Association, which is particularly concerned about the impact of the proposed park. Another relevant submission was received from Gippsland Development Ltd which, in a letter to the Minister for Environment and Conservation, refers to the final report of the ECC, which found no areas in Gippsland suitable for marine-based aquaculture. The letter states:

This finding contradicts previous research and if it were to be accepted by your government and incorporated in the marine national park proposals currently under consideration, a number of prospective aquaculture sites would be excluded. I am sure you are aware of the growing importance of aquaculture in world fish supply as wild stocks are depleted. Any exclusion of prospective alternate fish supply sources may well have significant long-term environmental consequences.

This is a serious organisation whose chairman until very recently was a former Deputy Premier of this state, the Honourable Robert Fordham. This is not an organisation that is flying off at a tangent just because it has a hot flush, but is an organisation representing local government and business communities in Gippsland, which is expressing a strong view that the government should take into account.

The letter to the Minister for Environment and Conservation further states:

I am sure that you are also aware that there is a growing backlash from a variety of sectoral interest groups as the implications of the report, particularly for small regional communities, becomes better understood. The socioeconomics study of the impact of the report's recommendations, at first reading, appears to be inadequate and incomplete and is obviously written to support the ECC rather than to provide an objective examination of the real impacts.

I could embellish at length the submissions but I will not do that because I know other honourable members wish to make contributions to the debate. In rounding up, I refer briefly to my recent experience at Corner Inlet, one of the areas where there has been great activity because of the real threat perceived to be imminent by the community.

It is interesting to note that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has taken a keen interest in this issue. I alert members to the fact that there will be a story called the 'Money fish' on the *Big Picture* television program on 29 March at 9.30 p.m. It will be worth watching as it is about a Corner Inlet fisherman. I warn members that

it is very colourful so it is a good thing it is on after 9.30 p.m. when the kids have gone to bed!

The subject of the program, Joe Pinzone, is a very colourful character, I think that is the best way of putting it. Joe's story is about his interest in fishing and the struggle to survive as a fisherman. The point of the program will be made in its own way but having met with Joe and many of his colleagues in recent times I can well understand why the fishermen are concerned. Last week I had an inspection on the water of the marine park in Corner Inlet. Fishermen representing Port Franklin, Port Albert and Port Welshpool were involved in that inspection. These people have lifetimes and generations of experience.

Also present were recreational fishermen representing various organisations. Honourable members might be surprised to hear that the Goulburn Valley fishing club has a couple of houses at Port Welshpool because so many of its members travel to Corner Inlet to fish and the club needed somewhere to accommodate them. That is not an unusual thing; a number of other clubs also have those facilities.

I will wind up by saying that the government is facing a very big decision that will involve attempting to satisfy an outcome that I dare say many members aspire to — that is, improving the management of Victoria's marine environment — but the consequences of that decision are not just theoretical, they are real in terms of the future of many small coastal communities. Unless the government is prepared to put in place a proper process to give voice to stakeholders' concerns at a local level, port by port and jetty by jetty if necessary, there will be enormous concern about the dislocation of those communities. That concern will be felt by those disenfranchised by the fact that the ministers responsible for this matter are not prepared to meet with those individuals.

Hon. E. C. CARBINES (Geelong) — As a member for Geelong Province I am pleased to speak against the motion put forward by the National Party. The motion rejects the Environment Conservation Council's (ECC) final report recommending the establishment of a system of marine national parks and sanctuaries along the Victorian coast. I am disappointed that the National Party has moved this motion today in an attempt to pre-empt the deliberation on and response by the Minister for Environment and Conservation to the ECC report.

The report was tabled in the other house in October last year and is the culmination of nine years work starting in 1991. Over those nine years there has been extensive

consultation with all stakeholders across the state. This has been a long and arduous process.

The Bracks government has a policy commitment to establish a network of marine parks along the Victorian coast. This policy was clearly articulated before the last state election in the Labor Party's policy document titled 'Our natural assets'. The government's support for the continuation of the ECC's marine, coastal and estuarine investigation — a reference given to it by the Kennett government I presume with the support of the National Party — clearly demonstrates its commitment to delivering on its election promise.

The eagerly awaited ECC report released in October last year after nine years of consultation sets out clear recommendations for the establishment of a system of 13 marine national parks and 11 sanctuaries along the Victorian coast. In total that comprises 6 per cent of the Victorian coast, not 60 per cent but only 6 per cent. Should the Minister for Environment and Conservation recommend adoption of the ECC's report that would place Victoria at the forefront of marine conservation not only nationally but internationally.

Three areas in Geelong have been recommended for inclusion in these marine parks and sanctuaries and that will have an impact on our local community. They include Point Addis and the Port Phillip Heads proposal, which includes Swan Bay. Since the ECC report was released last year there has been much community debate in Geelong.

Most honourable members would have been contacted by constituents expressing views for and against the report, and Geelong is no exception. My office has been inundated with letters, faxes and telephone calls on this very issue. I have met with local stakeholders including local environment groups, the Australian Recreational Fishing Alliance represented by Mr Horst Pfeifer and the charter boat operators including *Big Red*, which operates out of Queenscliff. All these stakeholders have been keen to ensure that I understand their views. A level of concern has been expressed to me about the proposals by recreational fishers and by business operators, but the vast majority of representations made to me by my constituents in Geelong show overwhelming support for the ECC's recommendations as they stand.

I take this opportunity to read some of the letters I have received showing support. The first is from the Swan Bay Environment Association and its president Felicity Thyer. She wrote to me in November last year and said:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Swan Bay Environment Association, which has a membership of 100 people.

The association wholeheartedly supports the final report and we hope that you will make every effort to ensure that all the recommendations are accepted by Parliament.

I received a letter from John Foss of the Surfriider Foundation based in Torquay. He wrote to me under the heading 'Fish have rights too'. He says:

Setting aside a very small part of our coastline to create a sanctuary for marine life is a huge step towards recognising that all forms of marine life have a right to be protected.

....

The Surfriider Foundation urges you to support the endorsement of the ECC recommendation for a marine national park at Point Addis.

Environmental groups have written to me as have ordinary members of the Geelong community. I would like to read a piece from a letter from Mr David Flanagan who lives in Geelong. He wrote to me in November last year and said:

I support the whole concept of marine national parks to protect representative samples of coastal marine environments and in particular those sited in my own area, that is the proposed park at Point Addis and the sanctuary at Torquay. As a diver I can experience at first hand the wonderful world at our doorstep. I desire strongly to see that environment well managed so that future generations can share my pleasure.

I received a letter from Pat Semmens of Queenscliff in which she said:

I am a resident of Queenscliff and I am writing to you to urge you to support the proposed creation of the system of marine parks and sanctuaries in Victoria.

...

I think there is an opportunity for Victoria to become a world leader in the conservation of its marine biodiversity and to not repeat the mistakes which have apparently been made in managing its forest resources.

Please keep me informed about your position and the government's position on the marine parks.

In February I received correspondence from a constituent from Clifton Springs, Ms Wendy Hebbard, who asked me to vote in favour of marine national parks. She states:

It is important to preserve our marine environment for not only our grandchildren but for all future generations.

I also received a letter from a constituent, Richard Barlow-Clifton from Torquay. He states:

Having read the Environment Conservation Council final report on marine, coastal and estuarine investigation, I am convinced that the report's proposal for the establishment of 13 highly protected marine national parks and 11 marine sanctuaries as well as 18 special management areas is the minimum safeguard necessary to conserve Victoria's unique

underwater environments. The areas proposed cover only 6.2 per cent of Victoria's waters, which does not infringe on the rights of recreational fishermen and sports people.

A copy of a letter from Ms Lynne Flakemore of Bellbrae, addressed to the honourable member for South Barwon in the other place, was forwarded to me. She states:

We have a unique and fragile marine environment on our doorstep that requires protection urgently. Change is never accepted easily by some members of the community, however, we are only talking 6.2 per cent of the total Victorian coast line ...

Let us take a stand and declare the implementation of a system of marine national parks for Victoria. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain!

I refer to a copy of a letter sent to the Honourable Mark Birrell from L. D. and B. J. Leavesley of Aireys Inlet, who asked the Liberal Party to support the final recommendations of the ECC for the establishment of a system of marine parks in Victoria. The letter states, in part:

Living as we do in the Surf Coast Shire our primary interests are with the proposed Point Addis MNP. However we believe that the principle of marine national parks needs to be recognised and acted upon in law and supported by governments throughout Australia. Marine national parks in other parts of the globe have shown over periods of up to 20 years or so that protection of 'no-take' areas results in increased fish numbers and sizes in the parks and from that greater reproductibility, leading to better fish catches adjacent to but outside the MNPs.

In addition, many of those parks are now associated with large ecotourism industries which have brought enhanced economic activity to the area.

I have received many letters about marine national parks. In February I was the only member of Parliament from the Geelong region to attend a packed meeting held at Deakin University's waterfront campus to discuss marine parks. About 150 people attended that meeting where Dr Bill Ballantine of the University of Auckland was the guest speaker. I was fascinated to hear Dr Ballantine recount the New Zealand experience with marine parks and the valuable community asset they have become and that they now enjoy support across New Zealand. He spoke of the creation of the Leigh Marine Reserve — one of the first fully protected marine reserves in the world.

The vast majority of the Geelong audience on that night were interested and engaged in the subject. It was great to see ordinary people, young and old, come out to learn and marvel at the potential for Victoria if the ECC's recommendations are adopted. However, a handful of dissenters in the audience dominated the

allocated question time to voice their opposition to the concept of a marine park.

Last week I had the opportunity of watching a documentary made about the New Zealand marine park experience spanning a number of decades. A number of speakers in the documentary espoused the virtues of marine parks. I was particularly interested in the comments of recreational fishers, indigenous Maori fishermen and lobster fishermen. All were committed to the establishment of marine parks in New Zealand, yet they had been the most vocal of critics and had actively campaigned against their establishment. I could not help but think of the similarity with the situation in Victoria today and the stance being taken by recreational fishers and the fishing industry in the current debate.

The speakers in the documentary — that is, the fishers, the indigenous fishermen and businessmen — explained that contrary to their previous stance they are now the strongest advocates for marine parks. The recreational fishers have noted a vast increase in New Zealand fish stocks in waters surrounding the marine national parks. Lobster fishermen from New Zealand marvelled at the increase in size and numbers of their catches in waters adjacent to and surrounding marine national parks. One even went so far as to say he would like to see marine national parks declared every 50 kilometres along the coast. That is amazing!

Every honourable member should take the opportunity to watch that documentary. The New Zealand experience highlights the economic benefits of marine national parks to the fishing industry and the economic stimulus in tourism, research, education, park management and enforcement.

I was interested to hear the comments earlier today of the Honourable Philip Davis about the minister not being prepared to consult with locals on this issue. On 1 March I was pleased to facilitate a meeting of Geelong stakeholders with the minister's advisers and chief of staff. During the day we met in Parliament House with charter boat operators, particularly from Big Red at Queenscliff, representatives of the Piscatorial Association, the Australian Marine Conservation Society, Angair, the Surfriders Foundation, Jan Juc Coast Action, Surfers Appreciating the Natural Environment, Torquay Coast Action, the Geelong Environment Council and the Swan Bay Environment Association.

The Recreational Fishing Alliance from Geelong was also invited on that day but decide it required a separate meeting with the minister as part of the process. That

meeting will be facilitated. I thank the Minister for Environment and Conservation for directly consulting with the key stakeholders from my electorate.

Recently I was sent a copy of a statement endorsed by key Geelong organisations in support of the ECC's proposals. I table that public statement of support, which states:

The undersigned groups and individuals support the creation of marine parks and reserves as recommended by the Environment Conservation Council totalling 6 per cent of the Victorian coastline.

We support the major elements of this historic initiative, and urge the Victorian state government to proclaim these parks and reserves for the following reasons:

the preservation of marine diversity;

the protection and promotion of a recovery of fish and other marine environments and stocks;

the promotion of a greater scientific and public understanding of these and other marine environments;

the improvement of our knowledge base in marine industries.

The ECC recommendations will advance all of these objectives.

The ECC has stated that Point Addis National Marine Park on the surf coast will provide important habitat for marine life, for example, leafy sea dragons, sponges and sea grasses, crayfish, abalone and is therefore an integral part of the marine park system.

The adoption of the ECC report will require proper resourcing to ensure that the marine national parks and other environmental management areas are meaningfully protected.

Proper management, monitoring, enforcement and study regimes are needed to realise the greatest benefit from this initiative, which should be seen as an investment in marine science and marine stocks for future generations.

The reduction in personnel and resources to fisheries and wildlife officers over recent years must be reversed. An adequate investment in marine science, conservation, and knowledge based, best practice marine industries is critical for the success of the parks.

As a society we have financial, social and environmental obligations. Fishermen and others with valuable local knowledge should not just be financially compensated but be given employment opportunities in the monitoring, scientific study and policing activities of the new parks and reserves, as well as in the traditional fishing industries.

A large majority of Victorians support marine conservation. The introduction of a system of marine parks and reserves is long overdue.

The nine-year process of consultation has been extensive and open.

We urge the Bracks government to proclaim these parks and reserves in this year 2001.

The supporting organisations are Angair, the Surfriders Foundation, Torquay ALP branch, Queenscliff ALP branch, Ocean Grove ALP branch, Apollo Bay ALP branch, Australian Greens Geelong region branch, Torquay Coast Action, Jan Juc Coast Action, the Friends of Spring Creek, Surfers Appreciating the Natural Environment, Surf Coast Shire, Anglesea Coast Action, Geelong Field Naturalists, Friends of the Bluff at Barwon Heads, the Aireys Inlet and District Association, Friends of the Aireys Inlet Coastal Reserve, the Geelong Bushwalking Club and the new Coastal Community School at Torquay. There were also the Geelong Environment Council, the Swan Bay Environment Association and the Queenscliff Community Association.

That is a raft of organisations from a community that supports in full the adoption of the Environment Conservation Council's recommendations. I reject the National Party's motion. The ECC's recommendations have provoked much interest in the region I represent. I look forward to the minister's response later this year. The establishment of a network of marine parks and sanctuaries along the Victorian coast would place Victoria at the forefront of worldwide marine conservation.

If that course is adopted future generations will consider the establishment of marine national parks as a hallmark of the Bracks government. Yesterday we heard the Leader of the National Party, the Honourable Peter Hall, acknowledge the contribution of the Honourable Vasey Houghton in the establishment of national parks in Victoria. Nobody can deny the significance of Victoria's national parks to our economy, but I wonder whether the National Party opposed their establishment, forecasting economic doom and gloom, years ago.

In rejecting the motion I wish the Minister for Environment and Conservation well in her deliberations. I look forward to the outcome later this year.

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — I acknowledge the concerns the National Party has expressed about the Environment Conservation Council's final report, *Marine, Coastal and Estuarine Investigation*, on commercial fishing and the impact it will have on local councils and villages. The Honourable Peter Hall outlined that concern with great passion and understanding, of which I believe the chamber is aware.

Monash Province is an inner urban electorate, and as an inaugural member of the Parks Victoria board I have a different view. It is easy in the year 2001 to take for granted the wonderful land-based national parks in this state. We think of them as always being there, but they were not always there. A tortuous process was gone through before they were finally established.

I shall outline some of the challenges that were mounted in the establishment of the land-based national parks and some of the debates and concerns voiced at the time are being voiced today about marine-based national parks.

The *Report of the State Development Committee on National Parks 1951–52* outlines the establishment of Victorian national parks. Tower Hill National Park was established in 1866, with an area of 597 hectares. Ferntree Gully National Park was established in 1882, with an area of 375 hectares and noted scenic features. Wilsons Promontory National Park, much beloved by all of us, was established in 1898, with an area of 41 449 hectares — it had its 100th anniversary celebrations recently. Mount Buffalo National Park was established in 1898, with an area of 11 044 hectares. Wyperfeld National Park was established in 1909, with an area of some 56 000 hectares. Closer to home, Kinglake National Park was established in 1928, with an area of 5700 hectares. The Grampians National Park was established in 1984, and most recently the Terrick Terrick National Park was established in 1999. They were not established without controversy.

In debating the National Parks Bill in this chamber on 30 May 1956, a Mr Fraser said:

Over recent years there has been an increasing realisation of the need to take more positive action to protect the native flora and fauna of Victoria.

The natural beauty of much of our bush scenery, especially in the mountain areas, is unsurpassed in any part of the world. In addition, our native animals are unique to Australia, and their preservation is a matter of national importance.

The same points could be made in relation to the establishment of marine parks today. Mr Fraser spoke in praise of the national parks approach, but not everyone took that view. In the 1956 National Parks Bill debate Mr Tom Mitchell, the Country Party member for Benambra, said:

It is very nice ... that the people of Koetong in the alps cannot be granted a new hall, whilst thousands of pounds will be provided for Crosby Morrison and his 'butterfly boys'.

In 1965 the Alpine National Park controversy continued. The 1965–66 Victorian National Parks Authority (VNPA) annual report states:

When the cry is for progress, it is difficult for the small, almost unrecognised voice of conservation to be heard or heeded.

The conservation movement had difficulty in 1965. In July 1979 Oliver Moriarty, the research secretary of APRA, said:

The extremely large national parks and wilderness areas being set aside in Australia are not nature reserves. They are harbours for fire hazard, noxious weeds and noxious animals. They are sources of damage to neighbouring private property and government forests.

Some of the communications I have received show the passion that comes through in the discussions on the establishment of marine parks. I remind the house of the successes of the land-based national parks. While I concede there is still a long way to go on noxious weeds and other issues, our national parks are seen as world best practice, and they are a vital part of our community, one that urban residents of my province use regularly.

To judge how successful our state-based national parks are one only has to examine the visitation statistics. I am not certain whether regional and rural visitors are using the national parks, but people in my province, and people from the province the Honourable Elaine Carbines represents, certainly visit national parks. The Hattah-Kulkyne National Park had 76 486 visitations; Mount Buffalo National Park had 196 227 visitations; the Organ Pipes on the fringe of the city, a wonderful geological outcrop, had 60 409 visitations; the Kinglake National Park had 126 158 visitations; the Wilsons Promontory National Park, one of the areas we all love and hold dear, had 394 139 visitations; and most surprising of all, the Port Campbell National Park had 1 533 018 visitations.

Obviously they are a huge success for both the state and international visitors.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. E. G. Stoney — Yes, the car park!

Hon. ANDREA COOTE — I know the car park will make a vast difference to what is happening down there!

I will now look at some of the history of marine parks. Many other honourable members have spoken about the formation of the marine parks. The Honourable Phil Davis held up report tomes, which I thought was interesting. He said that at least 10 metres of paper had gone into those reports.

To remind honourable members of the time frame I will go back to September 1991 when the government required the Land Conservation Council to carry out investigations of Victoria's marine, coastal and estuarine areas. There was the release of the descriptive report in June 1993, the release of the proposed recommendations in April 1995 and the release of the final recommendations in June 1996. The review of the draft final recommendations took place from August 1996 to 1997.

The former government required the newly constituted Environment Conservation Council to carry out the same investigation, starting from September 1997. It released an interim report in February 1998. There was a draft report in December 1999, and then the final report, which I have in my hand, came out in August 2000. So it is obvious that this has been no overnight development. It has taken some time, and I congratulate the ECC on a comprehensive report and an enormous amount of consultation.

Many of us have been involved in the consultation process. Like other honourable members, I too went to a public meeting. It was just as the Honourable Phil Davis said — character building. I went to a meeting in Geelong at which there were vehemently opposed sides. The conservationists were concerned about Swan Bay at Queenscliff and the commercial fishers were extremely agitated and put up a very good argument about fishing rights.

Some of the controversy over the establishment of the marine national parks is, as I suggested to the house, not unlike what we went through with the establishment of the land-based national parks. For example, the Victorian National Parks Association believes this is the right time to bring in the bill. Its members believe it is important and that there should not be a piecemeal approach as has happened elsewhere. The VNPA believes the marine parks should be established as a whole. In its briefing notes it says that it would encourage the state government to ensure that the marine national parks package includes income-adjustment measures to support coastal communities during the process of change. It states that the towns most affected would be Mallacoota and Portland, where fishing provides the greater percentage of employment.

Unlike the general perception of the VNPA, which perhaps is that marine parks should be adopted holus-bolus, the association has in fact had a good look at the likely impact, along the lines suggested earlier by the Honourable Peter Hall. The Honourable Phil Davis spoke about the way parks were established in New

Zealand. I say again that the VNPA would avoid the piecemeal approach of New Zealand and would take a much more comprehensive approach to the establishment of marine national parks like the ECC recommendations.

However, not everybody thinks that way. Most honourable members have been bombarded with information from both those supportive of the conservation movement and the establishment of the marine parks and those who are very anti the whole situation. I have had several such letters. A letter from Bill Jones of Highton states:

Contrary to the claims in the ECC report *Marine, Coastal and Estuarine Investigation* there is excellent access to the beaches adjoining Point Addis by a sealed road and DNR walking tracks. The beaches to the south of Point Addis which are the most suitable for surf fishing are not used or suitable for bathing or surfing, providing a unique opportunity for the recreational angler.

He had a point about a particular area and the matter that is of concern to him. Looking at the email list I think all honourable members received the next one, which is from Paul Melevende. He seems to be a recreational fisher, and he states strongly:

In my own case, almost every area I love to fish will be taken from me. These areas are the reason I bought a boat ... and the main reason I had my family go boating. We enjoy the beauty of these areas and treat them with respect. We also take very few fish ... ever.

I have no difficulty, as I am sure other honourable members have none, with accepting that Mr Melevende probably does not take many fish. I am certain he wishes he could take more! But I have to say that the comprehensive impact of that is a danger we should all take into consideration. Very few fish here and very few fish there can add up to many fish at the end of the day.

Angela Jones from Malvern in my electorate states:

The creation of these parks is tantalisingly close, but for this to happen you need to give your full support. If we can achieve a system of marine national parks as proposed Victoria will, according to a world-renowned conservationist, be the envy of the world. Perhaps, even more importantly, we will give this region an example that other states of Australia and other countries will be encouraged to follow.

In reflecting upon the information and the letters and emails I have received I would say that the urban areas have tended to favour the idea of the establishment of the marine parks and the people who live in the more coastal areas have some concerns, just as the Honourable Peter Hall acknowledged, and I understand that.

There is an enormous amount of diversity in Victoria's national parks, both land based and marine — for example, compare Point Nepean with Murray Sunset in the desert country of the Mallee. I encourage those who have not visited Murray Sunset to do so because it is a different sort of experience. The Terrick Terrick grasslands in the heart of the industrial area of Melbourne are an example of grasslands that we do not see any more, and they are certainly worth going to see. It is important to know that we have protected this area for future Victorians so that they will be able to see exactly what grasslands were like.

We all know the icons — the Grampians, Wilsons Promontory, Mount Buffalo and Port Campbell. I do not need to remind any honourable members of the importance we place on and the pride we all take in those wonderful national parks. If you look closely at parks such as Croajingalong in Gippsland you can see many of the issues that will have to be taken into consideration when creating marine parks.

Croajingalong is a very beautiful area. Most people go there for a wilderness experience, but the problem is that everyone wants to go there for a wilderness experience.

Every person who goes along a walking track takes a little more of that walking track. Just as everybody taking a few fish here and a few fish there adds up to an enormous number as a whole, so walking in a wilderness area such as Croajingalong makes inroads into the bush. A few people here making a camp site and staying one night is okay — it would seem it is not so bad as people staying for several nights when they can take branches from trees and cause significant damage — but everyone wants to have their wilderness experience. They do not want to go to a formal camp site; they do not want to have boardwalks; they want to have a wilderness experience, and they certainly do not want to see anybody else.

The management of that sort of process is difficult. Parks Victoria acknowledges that issue, and the government needs to take that into consideration when developing marine parks and determining the use of those marine parks for all Victorians.

It is important to understand and consider the diverse habitats that are found in marine parks, particularly when speaking about local areas. For example, there are giant kelp forests that are important world wide. There are seagrass meadows in Western Port. There are sandy seafloors from Lake Tyers to Cape Conran and sponge gardens at the southern end of Port Phillip Bay as well as rocky reefs, and on we go. We have the same sorts of diversity in what are to be our marine-based national

parks as we have in our land-based parks. I encourage the government to have a close look at the implications of that.

Finally, I quote the final report of the Environment Conservation Council, which states:

It is inevitable that for some, these recommendations and proposals will go too far and for others they will not go nearly far enough. However, we suspect that 20 years from now, Victoria without a system of marine national parks would be as unthinkable as Victoria today would be without the Wilsons Promontory or the Grampians National Parks.

From my experience of Parks Victoria, as an urban member of Parliament and from speaking with my constituents, I can say that land-based national parks are something of which we are all very proud and which are enjoyed at every level. The government has a big decision to make on the implications of the ECC report on marine national parks, and I encourage it to take into consideration the concerns of all people. It is important to consider what was said by the Honourables Philip Davis and Peter Hall and other speakers. It is imperative that the Bracks government consider the needs of all Victorians now and in the future.

Hon. G. R. CRAIGE (Central Highlands) — At the outset I make it clear that I support the establishment of marine parks. However, like anything else in life there must be a degree of credibility when establishing marine parks or parks in general. Credibility is important, and I will never forget something the late Frank Green told me about speed limits. He said that if a speed limit is credible in the eyes of a driver there will be greater adherence to it. I have always believed that if something has a good basis, that the players in the community such as scientists and researchers support it and it can be achieved on a proper basis with credibility, it will be successful. That is the test.

I turn to the magnificent marine parks we have in Australia and how they operate. A pamphlet published by the government entitled 'Going fishing this summer?' states:

The protection of our marine environment is an important issue for all fishers and for all other Victorians and will mean that we can continue to enjoy this favourite pastime well into the future.

Our bays and coastal waters belong to all Victorians and the government believes it is important to protect our precious marine environment for our kids and their kids.

I support that statement, and I also support the following statement of the National Party:

The National Party agrees with the ECC that as a society we have a responsibility to pass on an environment to future

generations that will give them the benefits that it has given us. We also agree that maintaining the health and integrity of our marine ecosystems is fundamental to good management of Victorian coastal and marine water.

I agree with those sentiments and it is important to place on the record that many people from many areas, in politics and in the fishing sector, have a deep-seated philosophy of support. VRFish made its point very clearly in a press release of October last year where it states:

The recreational fisher is not opposed to marine parks including no-take areas ...

I agree with that statement. It is important to understand the habitat of fish and the evolution of fishing, and the way it operates. VRFish further states:

We have consistently stated that any parks created must have a management plan in place and funds must be allocated to monitoring and research to make sure they are fulfilling the objectives that have been outlined. This has not been included in the final ECC report to government.

I also place on record the media statement released by VRFish on 14 March which states:

VRFish has not agreed to the final report by the ECC, has not supported the introduction of marine parks and it is incorrect to suggest that we have.

It is important to get that comment on the record because a great deal of misinformation has been presented during the debate and I believe it is important to take note of organisations such as VRFish, which represent recreational fishers in Victoria.

I turn to the multi-use issue in one of the most magnificent marine parks in Australia, which I have visited having been born and bred in South Australia. For a considerable time I lived in Ceduna in South Australia. I have experienced the beauty and magnificence of the Great Australian Bight and the Great Barrier Reef in many different ways. I turn to a document called 'Coasts and marine', which I obtained from the South Australian government web site. It states:

The Bight has a broad continental shelf which is up to 200 km wide in places. The shelf is trawled for flathead and Bight redfish in depths of 200 metres or less, and, there is seasonal deep water slope fishing for orange roughy in depths between 200 and 1000 metres.

In April 1998 the federal government acknowledged the unique biodiversity of this area and proclaimed a 1.7-million hectare Great Australian Bight Marine Park. The marine reserve includes ... a 1.3-million hectare area to protect sea floor wildlife, including sponges, algae and sea fans.

Declaration of the park followed consultation in South Australia with state government agencies, fishing and

petroleum industries and conservation groups. The aim of the proclamation was to ensure protection of the endangered southern right whale and Australian sea lion, while also allowing continuing commercial use of the area, including by the South Australian tuna industry.

The reality is that the different interests are not at odds and it is possible to have a marine park, viable commercial fishing and protect a species like the southern right whale. Modern management does make it work.

I turn to my area of difficulty. I have dived, fished and swum in many areas around Point Lonsdale. I have done the Lonsdale wall and the Portsea Hole, and I have fished excessively through the Heads. I have spoken to as many people as I can to try to gain an understanding of the way in which the environment at the Heads works. However, I have a difficulty that I believe gets to the nub of the issue. The minister stated that there was scientific support for marine parks, and I agree with that. However, the science must go to the areas where the arguments start. If you exclude one group over another and still call it a marine park, difficulties arise.

My argument is this: if one takes, for example, the wedge, which is the Point Lonsdale and Point Nepean area, the reality is that divers can go in and have a look, but fishermen cannot go in to fish. The fish around the Heads, which include snapper, whiting, barracouta, salmon and a raft of other fish are migratory; they do not stay in one area. It is important to acknowledge that significant kelp areas exist as well. However, the sponges referred to in the report do not exist on the top surface of the reef area or the wall; they exist under the ledges. Some people in the gallery believe they are greater experts than the people out there, but the reality is that the sponges will not be damaged by recreational fishing.

I suggest the sponges are damaged more by diving, and that the lead shot that is used for the signs and the anchors of boats is just as dangerous. A park should be multipurpose and not exclusive. These are the issues that need to be clearly understood by everybody. Science must be taken into account before the government determines that one group should have preference over another.

Marine parks are a good thing and they will receive encouragement if science supports their establishment. One group cannot go into a marine park while another is excluded. My argument will always be that if we are to do that, the whole of Port Phillip Bay should be declared as a marine or multipurpose park. We should not have a piecemeal approach. It is important that we

establish a marine park for all people to use, like the Great Australian Bight.

I have more to my speech, Mr President, but I will move that the debate be adjourned until later this day.

The PRESIDENT — Order! It is not possible to do that. Initially you can make a few remarks and then seek to adjourn the debate, but having made a substantial contribution it is not possible to adjourn halfway through.

Debate adjourned on motion of Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

BARLEY MARKETING (AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) introduced a bill to amend the Barley Marketing Act 1993 so as to indefinitely extend the single desk operations of ABB Grain Export Ltd.

Read first time.

Second reading

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

The misuse of national competition policy (NCP) principles by the Victorian Labor government will spell the end of Victoria's single desk for barley exports, a valuable tool in our barley growers' export marketing system.

The national competition policy framework was designed to ensure that the overall social and economic effects of any particular reform are positive. Under NCP, competition is not a Holy Grail to be introduced for its own sake. Competition must serve the public interest.

The single export desk for barley provides a net benefit to Australia that is consistent with these objectives of national competition policy. An Econtech study has demonstrated conclusively that export price premiums received from the Australian Barley Board (ABB) single desk deliver an average annual gain of A\$15 million to national economic welfare, including an average A\$11 million over the past five years, on price premiums on exports of feed barley to Japan

alone. Because of the complexities of the modelling Econtech has confirmed that these figures are almost certainly understated.

These net benefits, so clearly demonstrated by Econtech, work against the Labor government's deregulation policy and have therefore been ignored in government circles. No criticism either of Econtech's methodology or credibility, and why? Because the Victorian Treasury regularly uses Econtech's reliable services. Econtech even highlights methodology flaws and errors of fact in the Centre for International Economics study upon which this whole barley deregulation debate is founded. No pro-deregulation exponent has yet challenged any aspect of the Econtech analysis.

The Tasman report, hastily commissioned by the Treasurer, the Honourable John Brumby, late last year to examine claims that there has been substantial investment on the strength of export deregulation has never seen the light of day and remains unpublished. Not a single concrete argument has been produced by the Victorian Treasurer to support claims that deregulation will benefit the barley grower.

Joint barley marketing arrangements between South Australia and Victoria have been in place for 61 years. In 1993 complementary legislation in South Australia and Victoria extended the provisions of the Victorian Barley Marketing Act of 1958 to continue joint single desk barley marketing arrangements for a further five years. The bill positioned a more flexible and commercially oriented Australian Barley Board to operate within a partially deregulated domestic market, and tightened accountability to growers.

In 1998 the lapse of the five-year term and pressure from national competition policy once again brought barley marketing arrangements under review in the Barley Marketing (Amendment) Bill. The bill granted the ABB a two-year transition to a fully deregulated market. Two grower-owned companies were established: ABB Grain Ltd and ABB Grain Export Ltd which was granted an export monopoly. All parties voted to sunset the regulation of barley exports on 30 June 2001, when the single desk could be reviewed again. However, the second-reading speech made it clear that the then Minister for Agriculture and Resources would consult with the South Australian minister and with the barley industry generally about any transition to a fully deregulated market. This consultation has broken down, with South Australia choosing to continue regulation and the Victorian Labor Treasurer opting for deregulation.

Given the Liberal support for immediate deregulation, the National Party negotiated for, and got, a two-year period of grace to give the industry some breathing space. Contrary to claims by some, the Nationals have not done an 'about face' with this bill. Our support for deregulation was always dependent on the industry being ready for the single desk to be dismantled.

Victoria's Labor government has now determined that the single desk status of ABB Grain Export Ltd will end on 30 June 2001. It has done this despite a groundswell of opinion from growers and industry representatives that the decision is not in the best interests of the industry. It has done this in the context of every other grain trading state — Western Australia, New South Wales and even our previous partner, South Australia — extending export grain monopoly powers for their grains boards till 2005 or beyond. Queensland too has extended its desk to 2002, with the expectation that the desk will be extended annually beyond that.

The Labor government decrees that Victoria will go it alone, largely, it seems, based on the argument that deregulation must go ahead because some people have made investment decisions on the basis that it will. This is nonsense. Certainly many traders and farmers have invested in storage, but those decisions have been made because of changes in the domestic industry. This is a decision that should be made in the wake of a 'bigger picture' federal decision about the future of the Australian Wheat Board, not in anticipation of it. Other states will sensibly reconsider their positions when the single desk status of AWB comes up in 2004, as we should be doing.

There are powerful arguments for the Parliament to support this bill.

Single desk benefits grain growers

The overwhelming majority of growers want to keep a single desk for barley exports. This is not surprising. In most situations farmers are price takers not price setters. The barley single desk, unlike any other marketing system, puts farmers first. The sole purpose of its existence is to maximise grower returns.

Our barley harvest occurs over a few weeks in November and December, when a huge volume of grain comes onto the market. The single desk system accumulates these stocks and pays growers at harvest in the form of an advance. The ABB can then place barley into the market over the next 12 months to best advantage. Without a single desk the volume of grain delivered at harvest would depress prices. Growers only alternative would be to invest even more heavily in

on-farm storage, a commitment many have already made as a result of domestic deregulation.

The single desk practice of offering a significant advance at harvest puts a floor in the market so growers can make an informed choice about whether they will deliver to the single desk pools for export or negotiate with domestic buyers. ABB payment is guaranteed. No such guarantee is implied or given by traders and history is strewn with the bankruptcies of private grain traders. Removal of the single desk would mean the ABB would cease to be a buyer of last resort, given that ABB accepts whatever saleable grain it is offered. On the other hand private buyers can pull out of any market at a moment's notice.

Despite the wealth of marketing information available now in newspapers, by fax, from brokers and online, there are still many growers who are not comfortable with the task of marketing their own grain. They see the management of trading information as a full-time job for professional marketers, which allows them to get on with their job, which is growing a quality product.

The single desk has provided major research funding to improve the quality of Australian barley and enhance its attractiveness to buyers. In 1995, the Boston Consulting Group highlighted deficiencies in Australian varieties, especially their inferior malting and brewing qualities. Our overseas competitors were gaining a marketing edge with more attractive grains. To overcome varietal shortcomings, ABB is heavily involved in market driven research and plant breeding programs, working with CSIRO and the Malting Barley Quality Improvement Program to develop premium malting varieties. You have to ask whether a private trader would make this commitment.

Barley is traded on a corrupt world market

The world barley market is dominated by four major exporting countries — Europe, Australia, Canada and Turkey, which together account for 84 per cent of world exports. If we do not support the single desk, ABB's significant bargaining position as a major Australian exporter, shipping up to 2.5 million tonnes of barley, more than half of that malting, will be undermined.

All our major barley-exporting competitors have some form of government assistance. The only really free market is in South America where countries like Argentina consistently sell grain at prices lower than the rest of the world and where growers are calling for government subsidies to try and survive.

OECD figures released in June 2000 show that total government support for agriculture worldwide amounts to US\$360 billion a year.

At Seattle in December 1999, trade ministers from 135 countries launched the ninth round of global trade talks since the end of World War 2. These talks were a shambles; they completely failed. Protection levels in agriculture are now back to where they were 15 years ago and are likely to remain high.

As an example, over the past three years, direct government support for farmers in the United States has increased 300 per cent, much of it described as 'emergency assistance'. In the US many farmers are now dependent on government payments for at least half their income. In Japan and Europe, farm subsidies make up almost 60 per cent of farm income.

Into this heavily subsidised, distorted and corrupt world market, comes our strongest weapon of response — the single desk. We know our single desk marketeers are thorns in the side of the US grains industry, which, even now, is offering subsidies to exporters to clean grain to the standard of Australia. The US is one of those nations pushing to break our single-desk system down.

Single desk delivers what markets want

Our international customers want to do business with an organisation that commands respect. Because it is supported by legislation, the single desk has a quasi-government credibility and status overseas. To be truthful, it has no relationship with government at all. But its single-desk nature reassures customers about accountability and encourages them to sign contracts and offer special arrangements, like not requiring performance bonds. The single desk is especially useful in forming business relationships with government authorities or buyers linked to governments.

Our overseas customers also want quality and stability of supply. Its single-desk status gives ABB security of supply allowing forward sales and long-term contracts. ABB was the first ISO 9000 accredited grain marketing organisation in Australia. Attention by the single desk to quality issues results in a high percentage of ABB barley being sold as malting in premium markets. By contrast, the US, despite a production of 8 million tonnes, and many advantages, does not export any malting barley, even though they have tried on many occasions.

The single desk can, and does, command higher prices because it meets buyer requirements. ABB currently has the single largest barley quota into Japan, selling about 300 000 tonnes to them each year. The Japanese

market rewards ABB for its quality and its security of supply. The feed barley premium is about \$17 a tonne. The malting barley premium is \$43 a tonne. The Japanese Food Agency has expressed the view that it will take its business to Canada if the single desk is dismantled. What will happen now of course, with the single desk in SA assured, is that ABB will hold its Japanese allocation. But none of the benefit will flow to Victorian growers. ABB will be required to direct all single-desk benefit to South Australian pools.

Good marketing is all about linking the producer with the processor and being a reliable provider of high quality product. Barley is a dryland, bulk commodity crop. Its producers are at the mercy of an uncertain climate. A dry finish or a late frost can bring them undone and create significant quality problems. If a farmer enters a forward supply contract, he does so at huge risk. However, a single-desk facility can confidently enter forward contracts, secure in the knowledge that it can source quality grain from unaffected areas to consistently meet the standards demanded by the buyer.

The effect of deregulating our export trade

There are about 4500 barley-growing holdings in Victoria. More than half of world barley purchases are made by only three countries — Saudi Arabia, China and Japan. Quite simply, without the single desk, individual growers will be picked off. They will be squeezed by their need for a cash flow, their lack of storage and their overwhelming lack of market power.

The deregulated Argentinian wheat industry provides a model to Victoria of how not to travel. Argentina produces 15 million tonnes of wheat a year. With deregulation of this market, the focus of the industry has shifted from quality to throughput and volume based on fair average quality. All the blending is done at port and so the revenues generated from this are captured by the exporter-trader and not returned to the grower. A grower's marketing decision is usually about when to deliver to the local elevator or cooperative to sell for cash. In this environment, the focus is on maximising yields, which occurs at the expense of quality and thus, end-user requirements. There is little incentive for growers to produce better quality, higher value product, as they are unable to capture any pricing benefit from it. Growers have little ability to influence marketing outcomes and are actively pressured to sell at harvest despite low prices. The winners from deregulation in Argentina are the traders and multinationals at the expense of the producers. Is this what we want for Victorian growers?

The Argentinian barley industry provides a further, perhaps even more salutary lesson. Although Argentina has a large crop-producing landmass, it exports no malting barley at all. It barely manages to produce enough malting barley for its domestic brewing industry. Indeed, it regularly imports the shortfall. Why? Because without a single desk, no one has made the commitment to developing quality grain suitable for export. Their misfortune is our advantage, but why would we go that way, especially as on average over the last six years, almost 70 per cent of Victoria's barley exports have been malting barley. The contrast between the two industries is significant, with our Victorian industry being much more lucrative.

Even if a private trader were good enough to gain an export premium, why would he pass it on the growers? The truth is, he would not. Private, commercial grain traders are in the business of increasing their profits and historically this has usually been done at the expense of growers. Government needs to ask itself why traders are pushing the deregulation barrow so hard. Are they itching to help farmers? No, indeed. They want deregulation because they are itching to make profits! The trader sells first and buys afterward, seeking to purchase from the grower for the lowest price possible in order to maximise profit. That is what export deregulation will mean for our farmers.

There is a finite world market for barley. Production generally exceeds demand. Multiple sellers on an international market may compromise quality and sell at reduced prices to gain market access. ABB Grain Export Ltd's preferred supplier position will be eroded. We saw this recently when European grain traders put second-grade European malting barley into China, forcing prices down by \$US15 a tonne.

Domestic and export markets are not the same

Before domestic market deregulation in 1993, there were no cash prices for barley. Everything was pooled. A grower received an average of high and low sales. The fact that some growers do achieve higher prices feeds into the illusion that all deregulated prices are generally higher. But are they?

Relative to export prices, domestic malting barley prices have actually fallen. This is exactly the intention of competition policy. ABB records show clearly what they could charge maltsters before deregulation, and what they can charge them now. It is less. The four maltsters successfully play off 4500 Victorian barley growers, a few traders and the ABB against each other. Prior to deregulation, maltsters paid above export parity prices. Now they get malting barley not at export parity

prices but below, because everyone competes to sell to them. Some growers are better off because they do sell malting barley for high cash prices, but the fact that malting barley is cheaper now than it was indicates that many growers are worse off. Domestic competition has not only redistributed revenue between growers, for malting barley at least, it has almost certainly lowered the total revenue to the grower population.

There have been gains with domestic deregulation. On-farm storage means farmers are not forced to pay high harvest-time storage and handling charges. They can then supply the stockfeed market as it prefers to be supplied, by making available small quantities throughout the year. Technological development of farm storage has assisted in insect control. However, this issue will continue to be a challenge, particularly as end users increasingly move to toughen requirements on chemical residues. The ludicrous situation in which a dairy farmer could not legally buy grain from his grain-growing next-door neighbour has been eliminated.

Suggesting that what works on the domestic market will also work internationally is mischievous. The two markets are quite different. The domestic market for barley is driven by a stable demand for malting barley and a volatile feed market which rises and falls in line with the availability of competing products, weather conditions and the fortunes of the big users, who are generally feed lotterers and dairy farmers. Growers can directly deliver feed barley in small lots to marketer or end user. Domestically all sellers are on the same footing.

By contrast, the export market is best suited to large bulk deliveries backed up by strong market promotion and long-term customer relationships, with many customers being government authorities who must have a sustained supply of guaranteed quality. Food security is not an issue domestically. For many export customers, it is the issue.

ABB single desk markets product rather than sells a commodity

If we are to be quality food producers to the world, our final goal must be to market products, not sell vulnerable commodities. The National Party would have preferred that this debate was part of a broader discussion about the marketing of grain, rather than the more narrowly focused issue of the maintenance of the ABB single desk. However, the single desk is an important part of that bigger picture.

As legislators we can empower agencies by giving them single-desk status. They must respond with reciprocal obligations. They must give market assurances of quality and supply. They must provide major customers with technical support and advice and expect a premium, either in price or access, in return. The National Party believes that, in recent years, ABB has met these considerable obligations as a single-desk exporter.

Market development by ABB, in cash and kind, exceeds \$500 000 a year. At home, ABB has allied itself with other agribusinesses to form Graintrust Pty Ltd, a company aimed principally at developing and commercialising new seed varieties. The single desk is also a strong supporter and sponsor of a number of plant breeding and crop improvement programs. Abroad, ABB has strategic investments including a 5 per cent holding in Five Star Flour Mills in Egypt, which guarantees access. ABB participates in the Intrade group of companies, which provides extensive grain trading information. No private grain trader will make this sort of market development investment on behalf of Victorian growers.

In another outstanding example of market development, our single-desk's efforts to match customers to the grain that most suits them have won South Africa as a customer. Just last year, South Africa purchased two shipments of malting barley from Victoria. This potentially significant customer was successfully introduced to our barley when ABB provided malt for trial in their brewing industry. The company that purchased it is one of the biggest breweries in the world.

Far from blocking market signals as some have claimed, ABB's single desk has encouraged those signals to be brought back to growers and passed down through the quality management chain. In China, for example, all single-desk barley is sold as labelled and branded ABB grain. In Saudi Arabia, the biggest buyer of feed barley in the world, ABB also sells bagged product with a logo. The 50-kilogram bag is just the right size for loading onto camels. The barley single desk is already taking the next necessary step: it is not just selling a commodity; it is marketing a differentiated product. No signals are being blocked here.

The proponents of export deregulation have failed to provide a working model of how an unfettered market would work. It would be reckless to push ahead with such a significant change as dismantling the barley single desk without some evidence of what an unregulated export market would look like and who

would be the winners and losers. Government owes this to our farmers.

Not a single trader has shown he can capture one new market for Victorian barley if the single desk goes. No trader has demonstrated that he can squeeze a single extra dollar for the grower out of any of the markets our single desk currently supplies.

And yet, the Victorian Labor government, a government immobilised by consultation and opinion, has steamrollered blindly ahead on barley marketing. Labor trumpets its credentials in rural Victoria, but on this, as on other issues, it has failed country people. Grain marketing is a huge issue for those of us in country Victoria.

There is still time for the Bracks government to pull back and consult with all barley growers in a properly conducted poll to ascertain what the majority wants. It worked well in the dairy industry. The National Party believes a vote would formalise what we already know: an independent poll carried out by McGregor Tan Research of Adelaide has already signalled that 84 per cent of Victorian growers surveyed want the single desk retained. This view was consistently held, regardless of age or property size.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — And confirmed at the VFF conference on Tuesday!

Hon. B. W. BISHOP — Yes. A poll would send a powerful message to government, one way or the other. The National Party view is, overwhelmingly: while barley growers support the single desk, government must maintain it.

And now to the detailed provisions of the bill. This bill proposes to allow ABB Grain Export Ltd to continue single-desk export marketing arrangements indefinitely, without a sunset clause. There is an understanding that the legislation may be reviewed pending the outcome of the federal review of wheat marketing arrangements in 2004.

The bill will remove sections 5(1) and 33A(2) of the Barley Marketing Act 1993 to facilitate the indefinite extension of the single desk.

I commend this bill to the house.

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

Debate adjourned until next day.

Sitting suspended 1.06 p.m. until 2.12 p.m.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Basketball: funding

Hon. I. J. COVER (Geelong) — Yesterday the Minister for Sport and Recreation boasted about the inclusion of basketball in the 2006 Commonwealth Games to be held in Melbourne. How does the minister explain the government's failure to respond to an appeal made last December by the National Basketball League and Basketball Australia for assistance in establishing a unified basketball administration in Melbourne, which is now headed for Sydney?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I thank the honourable member for the question. I point out to the honourable member that the National Basketball League has a number of agreements with the state, one of which involved the Dream Team playing the then Australian team in a practice match in Melbourne prior to the Olympics. Funding for that game related to support for basketball in Victoria. Since the Olympics Sydney has tried to lure some sports away from Melbourne because it has facilities at Homebush that do not have tenant groups. That is to the detriment of sport in New South Wales and will cause significant difficulties. Some of these sports are running between states seeing who might contribute more to keep them within the state.

Something we do not promote in Victoria in sport or any industry development is a welfare-based mentality. We will help industry development, but we will not prop up organisations that cannot guarantee their own viability. One of the great things about this state in relation to sport and recreation is that we have a tremendous history of making infrastructure and organisations viable in their own right. That is a key criterion for sports and sporting infrastructure in this state.

Industrial relations: commonwealth act amendments

Hon. G. D. ROMANES (Melbourne) — I refer the Minister for Industrial Relations to the recent announcement by federal workplace relations minister, Tony Abbott, about proposed amendments to the federal Workplace Relations Act as it relates to Victoria. Will the minister advise the house how that announcement relates to a longstanding intergovernmental agreement between the state of Victoria and the commonwealth?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Industrial Relations) — The Honourable Tony Abbott, the federal

Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business rode into Melbourne last week and announced changes to the Workplace Relations Act as it relates to Victoria. The federal minister outlined a number of miserable changes to the Workplace Relations Act that purport to assist outworkers and workers covered by schedule 1A of that act.

It was no accident that Mr Abbott was accompanied to the media conference on the proposed changes by the Leader of the Opposition.

Opposition members interjecting.

Hon. M. M. GOULD — In his media statement Mr Abbott suggested that his proposals would be introduced next week. Unfortunately that would defy an intergovernmental agreement between the state of Victoria and the commonwealth dated 20 May 1997. That agreement covers any proposals by the commonwealth to amend the Victoria-specific provisions of the Workplace Relations Act. Clause 6 of the agreement states:

Except by written consent by Victoria, if the commonwealth proposes to amend or repeal any provision of part XV of, or schedule 1A to, the commonwealth act —

that is, the Workplace Relations Act —

it will give not less than six months notice in writing of the proposal.

Mr Abbott is proposing to introduce these changes into the federal Parliament next week, but the intergovernmental agreement between the state of Victoria and the commonwealth states that the commonwealth will not make any changes without giving six months notice.

Opposition members interjecting.

Hon. M. M. GOULD — Not only has Victoria not given any written consent allowing the commonwealth to proceed with these changes, Mr Abbott has not even provided a copy of the amendments he proposes to make to the federal law. Mr Abbott has not written and advised the state of Victoria of the proposed amendments.

Unfortunately it appears that the federal government is not interested in honouring an intergovernmental agreement or in consulting the Victorian government before a federal minister announces his intentions. The federal government is not interested in consultation, and it is not honouring an intergovernmental agreement.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The cross-chamber chat between both sides does not help the Minister for Industrial Relations in responding to the question. I ask the house to settle down.

Hon. M. M. GOULD — Clearly the federal government is not honouring an agreement it signed, and that approach has resulted in sleazy, backdoor deals.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. M. M. GOULD — The Leader of the Opposition is trying to get himself out of a fix. This intergovernmental agreement was signed by the present Leader of the Opposition in this chamber — it was signed by Mark Birrell and Peter Reith. The commonwealth government is tearing up an intergovernmental agreement.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. M. M. GOULD — It has not consulted with the Victorian government. Today I have written to Mr Abbott and made it clear that if the commonwealth unilaterally proceeds with its proposed changes it has the potential to damage the relationship between Victoria and the commonwealth. It would be outrageous if that is how the commonwealth government were to react to the state. I have asked the minister to meet me to discuss his proposals in a proper consultative manner, when I will remind him of the six months notice he is required to give.

Commonwealth Games: lawn bowls venue

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — Will the Minister for Sport and Recreation explain why the Bracks government will now support the City of Darebin instead of the City of Whitehorse as the site for the 2006 Commonwealth Games bowling venue, particularly given the substantial funding and support offered by the City of Whitehorse, thus breaking Labor's pre-election promise to base this key lawn bowls centre in Melbourne's eastern suburbs and snubbing the City of Whitehorse and the people of the eastern suburbs?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — It is worth noting, if opposition members are not aware, that a couple of weeks ago I announced that the state lawn bowls centre would be established at the John Cain Reserve in the City of Darebin. That should be a proud moment for the state because the facility will be part of the Commonwealth Games infrastructure.

In addition, one of the opportunities presented by the Commonwealth Games is the opportunity to build some tremendous community infrastructure for sport. As to the short list for that facility, the City of Darebin was short-listed, as was the City of Whitehorse. At the end of the day the best proposal came from the City of Darebin.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The chatter from both sides of the house is not helping question time. The best thing is for the government benches to support the minister by being silent and for members of the opposition to be quiet.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — In response to the interjections, the City of Whitehorse did withdraw from the proposal.

Hon. Andrew Brideson — Why?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — I will tell you if you care to listen. The two centres short-listed were required to fulfil a number of requirements. It was obvious to Sport and Recreation Victoria that the City of Whitehorse was unable to modify its application to suit the requirements in the project description. As I have mentioned on a number of occasions in this place, one of the key criteria for state sporting facilities is that they must have ongoing viability. The City of Whitehorse was not able to fulfil the requirements of making the facility viable in the long term, but the City of Darebin was able to. At the end of the day the difference related not only to viability but support from the peak bodies. The association representing the sport of lawn bowls was pleased and proud to support the Darebin facility which would be viable and feasible, and in the long-term interests of the sport.

Port of Melbourne: performance

Hon. D. G. HADDEN (Ballarat) — A range of economic indicators suggest that the national economy is slowing under the management of the federal coalition government. Victoria, however, appears to be resisting that trend. Will the Minister for Ports inform the house how the port of Melbourne is contributing to the performance of the Victorian economy?

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Ports) — It is interesting to note that even before I have the opportunity to answer the question opposition members on cue are talking down — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house has before it an invitation to join its Legislative Assembly colleagues at a certain time, but at this rate we will not make it. I call on the opposition not to persist with its barrage of interjections and on the ministers to abbreviate their answers.

Hon. C. C. BROAD — The Bracks government is buoyed by recent economic indicators that demonstrate the resilience of the Victorian economy to negative trends in the national economy. The positive indicators include the fact that Victoria continues to enjoy the strongest jobs growth in Australia with 17 000 new jobs created in February and more than 90 000 jobs created in the past calendar year.

I refer to two areas within my portfolio to demonstrate how the state economy continues to perform well in the face of federal coalition government economic trends. Both outcomes reflect on Victoria's ability to provide an efficient gateway to the world through Australia's leading port.

Firstly, the general level of exports through the port of Melbourne increased significantly. In particular, containerised exports loaded at the port grew strongly throughout 2000. For the 12 months ended 31 December 2000, 418 000 TEUs — 20-foot equivalent units — or 6.1 million tonnes of containerised commodities were exported to overseas markets, representing an increase of 10.6 per cent over the previous calendar year. Some of the major commodities were wool, meat, fruit and vegetables — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I suggest the house settle down and allow the minister to conclude her answer.

Hon. C. C. BROAD — If the opposition is willing to listen to my answer!

As well as the commodities to which I have referred, markets that have not been large historically have grown significantly, including exports to Turkey and Mexico.

The second matter relating to the port of Melbourne demonstrates the success stories being played out in the Victorian economy. Business in this state plays a role on the world stage; it is dynamic and responsive to changing conditions. I am particularly enthusiastic about the prospects for the Victorian automotive

industry. Overseas exports of new motor vehicles through the port of Melbourne continued to grow in the calendar year 2000, increasing by 12.5 per cent to almost 50 000 new vehicles.

It pleases me that the vast majority of these vehicles were Camrys produced at Toyota's Altona plant and destined for the Middle East. I congratulate Toyota on its efforts in growing the Middle East market. In total this market was responsible for more than 80 per cent of all new motor vehicle exports from the port of Melbourne and increased by 27.5 per cent over the 1999 calendar year.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. C. C. BROAD — I can assure the house — even if the opposition does not want to hear it — that the Bracks government's efforts are focused on complementing the private sector and the port in providing every opportunity to strengthen the Victorian economy and continue to grow the whole state.

Gaming: political donations

Hon. R. M. HALLAM (Western) — I refer the Minister for Industrial Relations to the Australian Labor Party policy document 'Responsible gaming', which was developed and released during the 1999 election campaign, and in particular to the specific commitment that:

Labor will limit donations to political parties by casino and gaming owners and operators and require their full and public disclosure.

Has the Labor Party in government determined that limit, and if so, will the minister inform the Victorian Parliament and community of what the limit is?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Industrial Relations) — This is not within my portfolio responsibility, it is the responsibility of the Minister for Gaming, therefore I decline to answer the question.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The Leader of the Government represents the Premier in this place, and the Premier generally has a watching brief over most elements of government commitments prior to an election. However, that does not mean we can require the minister to answer all questions of this type. The minister is declining to answer it, and we will move on to the next question.

Youth: 'Stay informed' brochure

Hon. JENNY MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — Will the Minister for Youth Affairs advise the house what action the Bracks government is taking to provide information to young people that will assist them in gaining access to government services and programs?

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Youth Affairs) — It is interesting that the opposition likes to trivialise such a question. There is only one thing that is significant for them at the moment, and it is not issues concerning youth and the community, it is the infighting in their parties.

This government has a real commitment to young people, as opposed to the previous government. As I outlined in my ministerial statement on youth last year, the government is committed to ensuring that young people are at the centre of government. As part of that we want young people to be heard and also to connect with the relevant government information. No doubt members of the opposition would not have seen the leaflet I have in my hand because they do not mix with young people. They would not appreciate that 100 000 of these leaflets have been distributed.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house had an excuse last night because it was after dinner, but there is no excuse in the middle of the afternoon. I once again ask the house to take cognisance of the timetable before us. I ask ministers to reduce the length of their answers. I know they have large typescripts to help them, which they are entitled to have, but I know they are across all these matters, and I ask that they give succinct answers. I ask the minister to respond quickly.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — As I was pointing out, 100 000 of these leaflets have been distributed across the community to young people during O Week. For the groovers on the other side, O Week is orientation week in a number of tertiary institutions.

Opposition members interjecting.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — Every time I get up to talk about youth those opposite refuse to listen. It is obvious that they also refuse to listen to young people.

The brochure is called 'Stay informed' and advises young people how to access information through government, such as information on the Centenary of Federation, the International Year of the Volunteer,

youth round tables, academic fees, courses and course advice and many other issues. No doubt members of the opposition may like to refer to the brochure because they do not seem to be prepared to communicate with young people.

The key message is to be informed and to stay informed. Obviously that is a message members of the opposition could well take heed of.

Youth: government pledge

Hon. A. P. OLEXANDER (Silvan) — I refer the Minister for Youth Affairs to the already discredited ALP youth policy, known as the Youth Pledge, in which Labor promised tertiary students in this state that it would reduce public transport concession card prices to under \$10. Is it not a fact that the government has clearly broken this promise, given that concession cards for tertiary students today cost \$75? Is this not another clear example of why Labor's Youth Pledge is not worth the paper it is written on?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Youth Affairs) — I thank the honourable member for his question, although obviously he is ill informed. The honourable member may not appreciate that there has been a substantial subsidy to the transport card for students, and the cost of that concession card has plummeted significantly.

If the honourable member understood the details of what it would cost without the government subsidy he would also appreciate that the government has gone a long way in addressing issues aimed at reducing the cost of transport to young people. The honourable member may also appreciate that when in government the opposition sold off public transport and privatised it, which had a significant impact.

Hon. A. P. Olexander — On a point of order, Mr President, the minister is obviously having difficulty recalling the specific content of his promise at the last election. I am happy to table the Labor Party's youth policy to assist him in answering my question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is no point of order.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — If the member appreciated the significance of the government subsidy on the student concession card, he would appreciate also that the cost has dropped from well over \$100 to \$75 or thereabouts. He would also appreciate that the government has gone to enormous lengths to reduce that figure and is still attempting to improve on that reduction by working closely with the private operators

of the transport system that the previous government was prepared to sell off.

Industrial relations: commonwealth act amendments

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA (Melbourne West) — I refer the Minister for Industrial Relations to the federal government's recent announcement about amendments to the Victoria-specific provisions of the Workplace Relations Act. Has the minister received advice from her department about those amendments and their effects on Victorian outworkers and, if so, what is that advice?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Industrial Relations) — I acknowledge the honourable member's keen interest in the plight of outworkers in this state. The federal minister's proposal about outworkers raises serious doubts about addressing any of the issues. In essence, Mr Abbott's proposal gives outworkers nothing more than a minimum hourly wage. They will not be able to receive the benefits that schedule 1A workers currently receive such as sick leave, annual leave, bereavement leave or any other employment entitlements. Once again the federal government has deserted outworkers, the most vulnerable workers in this state. There is still no limit on the number of hours that outworkers may work. There is no limit on the number of days that outworkers will work in a week. Mr Abbott's proposal entrenches the sweatshop, high-profit approach. All it does is give them an hourly rate.

The New South Wales government, the Queensland government, the previous Western Australia conservative government and the South Australian government have all introduced legislation to deem outworkers as employees. But what does this opposition do? What does the federal government do? Nothing! Not a thing for outworkers — absolutely nothing. The proposal in no way addresses the concerns and issues of outworkers in this state. All it does is give them a minimum hourly rate.

Once again these Victorians — these most vulnerable workers — are being given even less than other low-paid workers in this state would be entitled to receive under the proposal that exists at the moment, which turns Victoria into the sweatshop of Australia. Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia are protecting outworkers, but the door is open here in Victoria for all the unscrupulous employers to come in and turn outworkers into slave labour in Third World conditions. What the federal government proposes is outrageous, and the attempts by

the opposition to support that miserly proposal, which pretends to protect the outworkers in this state, is equally outrageous and is no more than a political stunt.

Tammy van Wisse

Hon. P. A. KATSAMBANIS (Monash) — All honourable members would be aware of the remarkable achievements of a great young Victorian, Tammy van Wisse, who recently became the first person to swim the length of the Murray River. I ask the Minister for Sport and Recreation why he has not recognised this amazing achievement of a great Victorian with a state reception just like the South Australian, New South Wales and federal governments have done?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — While the efforts of Tammy van Wisse are absolutely extraordinary and I would certainly like to commend her on the amazing efforts she has made to swim the length of the Murray, I must also acknowledge the other issues that affect sportspeople who have achieved. Should one clap and cheer and pat them on the back and then leave them floundering in terms of their future — which can often be the case with sportspeople — or does one get them actively involved in community participation to further develop their future?

That is one of the things this government has been able to do. The Office for Women has involved Tammy van Wisse in a number of community programs. So there is a difference. One is tangible support after somebody has performed in a significant manner; the other is to offer a cocktail party, which sure sounds good. However, I know from my own point of view that the more significant impact after the event for sportspeople is to provide something tangible, such as getting them involved in the community, linking them with the community, rather than throwing a cocktail party and giving them a pat on the back.

Electricity: generation investment

Hon. R. F. SMITH (Chelsea) — Will the Minister for Energy and Resources comment on the prospects for additional investment in the Victorian electricity generation industry?

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) — One key aim of the Bracks government is to ensure that there are sufficient incentives in the market to provide ongoing, timely and efficient investment in electricity demand to meet growth in average demand, peak demand and extreme periods of peak demand.

The efforts of the Bracks government have been in stark contrast to those of the former Kennett government, which washed its hands of any future planning role for this essential service. So while the Victorian opposition has again been talking down the Victorian economy, the Bracks government has been able to position Victoria with a strong economic base, good employment and strong investment incentives.

Proof of that is evident in the fact that there are sufficient incentives in the market to encourage new investment in Victoria's electricity industry. These have come in the form of a number of significant new investment proposals. Publicly announced proposals to date involving additional new capacity in Victoria include Edison Mission Energy, which is expected to build a \$150 million power station at Edison Mission's Loy Yang B power station in the Latrobe Valley. The plant will have a capacity of some 300 megawatts and is expected to cost around \$150 million.

In addition, the proposal referred to on 13 March this year involves the AGL announcement to build a new gas-fired power station at Somerton. That plant will have the capacity of some 150 megawatts at an estimated cost of around \$75 million.

Further to those proposals I was very pleased on 9 March this year to be involved in the recommissioning by Southern Hydro of two hydrogenerator units at Lake Eildon power station. These units provide some 15 megawatts of renewable energy, which is available at peak times in particular. Everyone involved in that project is to be congratulated on recommissioning those generator units. The Bracks government welcomes these proposals and the recommissioning of Lake Eildon and will continue to do everything it can to encourage their development, assuming of course that the companies pursuing those projects adhere to the necessary planning processes.

The Bracks government will continue to do everything in its power to ensure Victoria retains a strong economic base, good employment and strong investment incentives, including strong incentives to invest in the electricity industry — which is more than happened under the previous government.

JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT

Drugs: education and prevention strategies

The PRESIDENT — Order! The time has arrived for members to attend the Legislative Assembly chamber if they wish to hear addresses by Mr Neil

Comrie, Dr David Penington and other expert advisers on drug education and prevention.

Following the addresses Mr Comrie, Dr Penington and the other expert advisers will answer questions from the floor for a period of 30 minutes. Members of the Council will have the opportunity to participate in that process.

Members of the Council will withdraw from the Assembly chamber at the conclusion of the addresses and the question and answer segment, and prior to the commencement of the Assembly debate on the motion to take note of the addresses.

I will resume the chair at the ringing of the bells. A motion to take note of the addresses will then be moved to facilitate debate in this house.

Sitting suspended 2.52 p.m. until 5.37 p.m.

DRUGS: EDUCATION AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Industrial Relations) — By leave, I move:

That the Council take note of the addresses of Mr Neil Comrie, Dr David Penington and the other expert advisers on drug education and prevention, given in the Legislative Assembly chamber on 21 March 2001.

Honourable members who have just returned to this chamber after hearing the addresses of Dr Penington, Mr Neil Comrie and the other expert panel members would be well aware that the lives of all members in this house will have been touched by someone who has or has had a drug addiction, be it a family member, a friend, a neighbour or a constituent. It is a heart-wrenching experience for those who are trying to look after and care for someone who has a drug addiction, be they a family member, a friend, a neighbour or someone you have grown up with and have known all your life, through school or as a relative. It is something everybody in the community has been touched by.

My 17-year-old daughter tells me stories when she comes home from school about kids she talks to at school, on the bus on the way home or on the tram, and at times I live in fear that one day she will not come home because she has established an addiction. I come from a large family and many of my nieces and nephews have told me about friends who have been touched by drugs.

I can remember saying to the Leader of the Opposition during the President's dinner that my sister's friend's 14-year-old daughter had disappeared for three weeks and nobody knew where she was.

They eventually found her and tests were done; she had heroin in her system. This girl just disappeared, got in with a group of people who hung around the schools, and subsequently became a drug addict at the age of 14 years. Goodness knows what other things she was up to over the three weeks that she disappeared. So I have been touched by it. I have had friends who have died from drug overdoses. I believe we, as representatives of the state of Victoria, need to be cognisant of the comments made earlier today in the other place by the expert panel. We need to acknowledge the issues and address them to ensure that we do what we can within our powers to eradicate drugs from this community.

Over the past 10 years Victoria has experienced the escalating effects of drug misuse in our society. The problem is a national one and the abuse of drugs is one of the most important issues facing our community. It is a problem that concerns all Australians. It is a problem honourable members all have to deal with, acknowledge that it is out there and attempt to address.

Mr Comrie provided statistics today on the number of young children taking up illicit drugs to show that drug experimentation and dependency in a younger and wider population of people is increasing. Daily greater and greater numbers of people are seeking treatment for opium-based addiction. Mr Comrie said that by 2007 many thousands of young people would have experienced marijuana or other drugs by the time they were 15 or 16 years.

Drug misuse causes harm to all of us on a number of levels. It causes harm to our health. It causes harm as a result of increasing crime. Honourable members will be aware of neighbours and friends whose houses have been broken into by people with a need to satisfy their drug addiction, or the growing number of people who are incarcerated as a result of drug-induced criminal activities. Drug use damages the lives of families. It tears families apart because they do not know what to do. An article in the newspaper today referred to a grandfather who broke the law in an attempt to ensure that his grandson could get an illegal substance. Drug use places affected people in danger of becoming involved in criminal activities, sexual abuse, prostitution — the sorts of things honourable members heard about today at the joint sitting.

The Bracks government has taken a comprehensive four-component approach to the tackling of the drug problem in Victoria. The first component is prevention, which I believe is the key result of today's joint sitting on drugs. The second is harm minimisation, or the saving of lives. We have to save the lives of our young people and of other members of the community as a result of drug addiction. The third is rehabilitation and treatment. And, of course, we must apply legal enforcement. That is why the government has introduced legislation that will increase penalties for the commercial sale of illicit drugs. We want to put the big guys away. We want to get them away from our kids, and stop them from poisoning them for the rest of their lives.

Prevention of drug abuse will occur through education and addressing underlying social factors. In his address Peter Wearne spoke about some of the underlying factors associated with the young kids who move through his centre. At 20 years of age some still carry the burn scars from cigarettes that were placed on their bodies when they were under the age of 12 months. He referred to the mental health problems that are associated with some drug addicts. He also spoke about lifestyles, broken families and parents with drug addictions. Those are the issues about which we must educate our young people.

The government's approach to implement programs that aim to reduce the number of deaths resulting from overdoses and to assist users through treatment and rehabilitation is most important. If we do not reduce the number of deaths from overdoses and properly institute treatment and rehabilitation we are not doing what we should be doing. We are not looking after our youth and the community as a whole. The problem is not limited to youth. There are many people aged 30, 40, and 50 years who are addicted to drugs. The pharmacist at the end of my street runs a methadone program. I have gone down there at night to pick up a prescription or whatever and have seen the number of people that come into that pharmacy and they are all ages. They are not just 19 or 20-year-olds; many are in their 30s and above. We have to ensure that we break the cycle through education so that our young kids do not get into the drug culture.

The next component of the government's drug policy, getting lives back on track, relies to a large extent on strengthening treatment and rehabilitation for those affected by drug abuse. We must ensure that once people get into a rehabilitation program they can address all of the issues associated with their drug abuse. If we do not strengthen the treatment and rehabilitation we will hear more stories such as the one

we heard today of somebody going through a rehab program and dying within a week.

The last component of the government's drug policy, to effectively police the drug trade, is also extremely important. The government strategy is to encourage the philosophy of harm minimisation adopted by the Victorian police by providing more adequate levels of policing to tackle the drug problem. What started off as one of the initiatives by the Victoria Police has now taken off right across the community, as can be seen in Broadmeadows, which is part of my electorate. Harm minimisation also involves referrals, which means that rather than being incarcerated in jail addicted people are sent off to other areas so that they do not get caught up in the correction system cycle. That is one way to break the nexus and assist them with their problems. We are committed to increasing police in our community and we are committed to ensuring that the harm minimisation that was adopted by the police is expanded.

The government believes those four components of prevention, harm minimisation, rehabilitation and treatment and effective law enforcement will constitute a comprehensive approach to tackling the drug problem in Victoria today and will provide the key to saving Victorian lives. The drug policy expert committee chaired by Dr David Penington was established in November 1999 to undertake a public consultation process and report to the government on implementation strategies to tackle drug problems in the community. The committee recently handed down its second report, which makes recommendations for a way forward in the fight against the harm caused by drugs.

The government has acted swiftly on the recommendations coming from the expert panel. It has committed \$77 million to new drug initiatives over the next three years, which was provided for in the budget last year. Of that \$77 million, \$19 million has been allocated for the first year.

New initiatives, most of which have already been implemented, include youth specific services, services for parents and families, services for street-based drug users and services to provide comprehensive treatment to people who experience both drug problems and mental illness. Services are provided for homeless drug users, and post-withdrawal services are available.

Those services are necessary to ensure we look after young people, and the parents and families who deal with this issue daily if their children have a drug addiction. If we do not provide services where the drug

trafficking takes place, which is out in the streets, and if we do not provide comprehensive treatment for people who experience both drug problems and mental illness, we are not looking after our community as a whole. We need to do that, and that is what the government has done.

The new initiatives build on current Victorian drug treatment systems already in place, which comprise a wide range of services to suit individual clients as well as statewide specialist services. This is not an exercise in taking away what is there; the government is building on what is in place because it acknowledges that drugs are an issue that must be addressed now.

The government has taken the view that a wide range of drug treatment services allows services to be tailored to individual treatment needs. Therefore, funding is provided for a variety of different service types, including counselling and consultancies. Drug users need counselling and continuing care. Alcohol and drug supported accommodation as well as home-based and outpatient facilities are necessary. Residential rehabilitation, methadone programs, peer support and outreach services are necessary, and we must ensure the services are suitable for Koori communities. As Professor Hamilton said, we have to do it the Australian way, and we must ensure we provide services that are relevant to Australian and Victorian communities.

The government is committed to that end. That is why it has taken the approach of providing a wide range of services to look after families and those with drug addictions. The government acknowledges that drug addiction crosses all socioeconomic boundaries — there are no restrictions. It does not matter whether people come from broken homes or from well-off families.

Treatment services are offered in the context of strategies designed to increase the effectiveness of law enforcement, link offenders into treatment programs, target the growing number of young people with drug problems and provide better information to the public about drugs and their effects. It is important for community members to know where to go and what to do if they know someone who has a drug addiction and how to try to prevent somebody from becoming addicted. That is the bottom line — prevention is better than cure.

Effective drug treatment programs need to target three key areas of addiction: the physical, psychological and lifestyle. Today in the other place we were told that we need to address and identify those three areas. In particular, the psychological impact of drug use and its

effect on the lifestyle of people requires long and persistent treatment. Drug addiction is a difficult condition to overcome due to its chronic relapse nature. It requires patience and perseverance on the part of clients and the community.

Today in the other place David Brunt spoke of the funeral of a young man who had gone through a drug rehabilitation program. Within one week he was dead. We must acknowledge that the strategies we put in place are not a short-term fix. We must acknowledge that these resources are long term and that they require persistence and patience on the part of the people delivering them.

The Victorian drug treatment service system delivered more than 42 000 courses of treatment to more than 23 500 clients in the 1999–2000 financial year. That is a lot of people. The treatment resulted in a positive outcome for clients in the vast majority of cases. The drug service system is delivered across Victoria. Some clients will come back again and again, but the fact is that 23 500 people were treated in that time.

Victoria has been recognised as a national leader in developing responses to clients at different stages of their drug problem. The strategies include the establishment of leading drug treatment programs for young people and programs that divert offenders with drug problems away from the criminal justice system and into treatment services. These initiatives have gained attention nationally and internationally. It is something that Victoria has done, and it has been acknowledged that this is a great way to go.

Through the police and court diversion programs trialled in Victoria and currently being implemented under the national illicit drug strategy diversion initiative there has been a real commitment from government departments to work together. That was one of the issues Mr Comrie identified — public servants and departments working together. The Department of Human Services and the Department of Justice have worked with the Victoria Police and the Magistrates Court to develop and implement a range of programs that direct offenders into drug assessment and treatment programs. The departments, the Magistrates Court and the Victoria Police are working together on diversion programs that started in Victoria and are now being acknowledged Australia wide and internationally as appropriate strategies.

The primary aim of convening the sitting in the other place was to acknowledge that the drug problem in Victoria is serious. It affects all of us, either personally or as representatives of the state. We hope to tackle the

problem in a strong, innovative and determined manner to achieve a positive response for all Victorians.

As a result of the sitting today the Premier has announced plans to establish an independent body of experts to oversee drug prevention strategies. The Premier's Drug Prevention Council will establish links with business, philanthropists and the community to contribute skills, resources and ideas to tackle drug abuse. Members of that council will come from a range of backgrounds, but they will all have experience at the coalface. The Premier's focus on prevention will include the establishment of the Premier's Drug Prevention Council, which will have its own secretariat and will develop links with families, business, philanthropists and key groups such as the Australian Medical Association and the Law Institute of Victoria to contribute money and skills to new drug prevention ideas.

The government will provide \$2.4 million for a major drug awareness campaign commencing mid-year that will target young people who may be experimenting with drugs, including cannabis, to direct them and their families to help.

This will end the short-term nature of funding under the former government's Turning the Tide program with an ongoing financial commitment to give security to drug services. This government is about ongoing commitment instead of the short-term funding that came from Turning the Tide.

The Premier today announced that there will be an ongoing financial commitment to give security to drug services. That was one of the issues that Dr Penington raised today in his contribution — the concern that just before running out of funding, drug services spend most of their time putting in funding submissions rather than delivering services. The Premier today announced that this government is committed to establishing the Premier's drug prevention council with its own secretariat. Some \$2.4 million will be allocated for a major drug awareness campaign commencing mid-year targeting young people who may be experimenting with illicit drugs such as cannabis. As I said in my contribution a little earlier, it is important that we reach these young people and point out the dangers of experimentation so that they do not go from smoking cigarettes to smoking marijuana and then on to smoking heroin. That is what we have to do and that is what this government is committed to do.

I urge all honourable members to take note of and support the motion. They should support the action of the previous government and the ongoing commitment

this government has continued with its initiatives and the new initiative announced today.

Hon. M. T. LUCKINS (Waverley) — It is with pleasure that I note the motion that has been moved by the Minister for Industrial Relations. However, the motion calls only for us to note the comments made in the other chamber during the joint sitting. The joint sitting today has provided all members of Parliament with the opportunity to refocus their thoughts on the drug challenge facing the entire Victorian community. Today is an opportunity to draw a line in the sand and to start on a new road to attack the drug problem at its very roots, to drugproof the next generation of Victorians from those starting at school now to those yet to be born. We in the Liberal Party and in the opposition are concerned that we do not want to just take note of the important contributions that have been made during today's joint sitting. The minister's motion states:

That the Council take note of the addresses of Mr Neil Comrie, Dr David Penington and the other expert advisers on drug education and prevention given in the Legislative Assembly Chamber on 21 March 2001.

I offer the following constructive amendment:

That the following expression be added to the motion:

'and believes that the Victorian Parliament should establish a drug education and early intervention authority, a multi-agency approach to protect our next generation of young people from drug abuse by implementing agreed strategies on drug and lifestyle education, early intervention and diversion, and that the authority must be appropriately resourced and report directly to Parliament'.

Opposition members are open to the idea of evolving this motion with any contribution the government may seek to make, but we believe that to simply take note of the speeches made in the other house today is not sufficient. We have to draw a line in the sand. We have to say, 'Enough is enough. We start anew today'. Whether this body be called an authority or an advisory council, we want it recorded that we in the Liberal Party want to do more than just take note of the speeches that have been given in the joint sitting today.

The saying, 'It takes a whole village to raise a child' conveys the responsibility that we have as parliamentarians, as parents and as Victorians to work together to protect our children, to nurture them and guide them on their way through adolescence and into adulthood.

Rob Moodie, the chief executive officer of Vichealth, this afternoon spoke eloquently about the need for

connectedness in our society. He talked about identifying protective factors and risk factors in our young people. Drug addicts are not bad people and they do not come from bad families. Drug pushers do not discriminate on the basis of socioeconomic or family status.

I fear for the health and safety of my two children aged three and six as they grow and move into adolescence. I also have 10 nephews and nieces all around the same age. Even though I am fortunate as a parliamentarian with an interest in health to have information and guidance available to me about where to go for assistance, I am painfully aware that despite my best efforts my children could, too, end up as statistics in the drug battle.

Dr Penington this afternoon referred to the fact that there have been repeated inquiries into the issue of drugs in our community. He said that the facts are well established. That is true. We have invested so much time and money researching, reviewing and evaluating programs operating not only in Victoria but all over the world, but we still have not armed the front line in this war against drugs — the parents and teachers — with strategies aimed at preventing the addiction in children in the first place.

We heard today about the experiences of experts in the drug field, a social worker and a teacher. The sad fact remains that regardless of how many talkfests are held and how many motherhood statements are made, we have no real strategy in place to save future generations from losing their lives. We listen to academics and we review the studies. Now we need to develop and quickly implement a plan of action to drugproof our children. I congratulate both Neil Comrie and the *Herald Sun* for their initiative in pushing for the joint sitting of Parliament that was held today.

The authority proposed in the amendment would have a multi-agency and coordinated approach across all areas of government and community. It is vitally important that this organisation — whatever it may be called — is not only appropriately and independently resourced, but also reports directly to Parliament, not to the Premier of the day. We need a truly bipartisan and independent authority that can coordinate our full drug response.

Hon. R. A. Best — Tripartisan.

Hon. M. T. LUCKINS — Sorry, tripartisan. I stand corrected by my National Party colleague.

An Honourable Member — What about the Independents? Where do you put them in the equation?

Hon. M. T. LUCKINS — It should be a tripartisan, multi-party strategy.

Hon. R. A. Best — Tripartisan support for the establishment of Vichealth. I think that should be another — —

Hon. M. T. LUCKINS — Excellent. I will be talking about Vichealth later in my contribution. Vichealth was established by a tripartisan motion in this house in 1987 at a time the Liberal Party was not in coalition with its esteemed National Party colleagues. As I said, I will expand on that concept later in my contribution.

Drug addiction affects all the community. Most people have been directly touched by it, whether through personal experience through our children, grandchildren, other people in the community and neighbours. As Neil Comrie said today, drug addiction is responsible for around 70 per cent of crimes. That also has personal ramifications for all Victorians because our personal safety, the sanctity of our homes and the rising cost of insurance affects us all equally. In addition, we are put at risk by discarded needles and we have the ever-growing road safety issues with drug-affected drivers and pedestrians.

For the addicts themselves, the tragic spiral of drug use and abuse destroys their lives by robbing them of self-esteem and self-respect. It forces them to push away the people that love them — their families and friends. Ultimately, it will rob them of their lives.

According to a recent study, the average age of a person who dies from a heroin overdose is 28. That person will have been using for around 10 years. It is quite clear that young people are turning to heroin very shortly after leaving school.

Professor Margaret Hamilton referred to pathways to illicit drug addiction. She said the pathway started with smoking, then moved to experimenting with marijuana and then on to illicit drugs, with the subsequent terrible consequences of addiction. Addicts need timely and targeted programs to help them immediately when they decide to get clean. Today we are not concentrating on the treatment of addicts who sadly find their lives at risk. Unfortunately, for my generation and those younger than me we may have already lost so many in our battle with drugs. We must continue to provide assistance for detoxification and rehabilitation for users and ensure they can rejoin society by enhancing their bonds with their families and the community.

Parliament and the community have come a long way from the first joint sitting in 1996. Within a few weeks

of being elected to Parliament in 1996 new members had the opportunity to first hear from Dr Penington. A lot of work has been done since then with the Turning the Tide strategy, other government programs and innovative community programs supported and funded by government.

I place on the record the important work of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, chaired in the last Parliament by the Honourable Andrew Brideson, my colleague in Waverley Province, and now chaired by the Honourable Cameron Boardman. Over five years the committee has gathered considerable empirical evidence on many different aspects of drugs in our community. I am pleased that after the 1996 joint sitting our attitude on how to treat addicts changed from treating them as criminals to treating the issue as a health problem.

Harm minimisation has saved some lives, but many lives have been lost because young people did not see the benefit of getting clean. Peter Wearne from the Youth Substance Abuse Service said that some drug users, particular young people, self-medicated to remain oblivious to the traumas that had occurred in their childhood. We do not easily get around those issues.

Many addicts have lost their lives because they could not access the scarce resources available for detoxification and, more importantly, to rehabilitate to enable them to readily move back into society. It takes only one bad hit with one bad batch of heroin for a child, sibling, grandchild or friend to be lost to us forever. That is a tragedy not just for the family and friends of the person concerned, but society misses out when so many young people with such potential die without fulfilling that potential.

Sadly, many addicts feel they have nothing to contribute to society. We need to instil in young people a sense of worth, value, hope and self-respect. Our challenge today is to save the lives of our children, those who are young enough to heed the message to nip in the bud experimentation and subsequent addiction. We need to drugproof our young children so that when they encounter drugs they will find them abhorrent. Hopefully, armed with positive messages about protecting their bodies from harmful substances, our children will say no to drugs and seek early intervention if they have begun to experiment with substances that they will inevitably be exposed to despite the best efforts of families, parents, teachers and the police. In this way, over time, we will decrease the amount of drugs in our society.

In his contribution this afternoon Neil Comrie said that if we decrease the demand for drugs we will not be seen as a worthwhile market by drug cartels and over time we will achieve a significant reduction in the amount of drugs in the community. In an article in the *Herald Sun* of 26 February this year Neil Comrie called for a 10-year strategy. We must face the fact that, just as there is no quick fix for addiction and rehabilitation, there is no quick fix for an educative strategy, but we must make a start down that road.

In moving this motion today the government has announced a new strategy. If this was to be a tripartisan approach surely the government would have discussed its program with the opposition prior to its being announced. The opposition is not aware of the structure of the board, the funding, the resources, how it will report, its composition or anything else. Having this announcement made 2 minutes after the Premier gave a vote of thanks to our guests at the joint sitting, without discussion with the other parties and probably the Independents, flies in the face of a tripartisan approach to this issue, which is of great importance to all of us.

That is why the Liberal Party has moved an amendment to the motion of the Leader of the House that will enable the new authority to report directly to Parliament. It is not good enough to continue to note speeches made by academics who have a contribution to make in this debate, and over time have made many contributions on this issue. How much longer will we have talkfests without actually committing to starting a strategy? People are dying in the streets. I do not want my family to be threatened because of the inaction of the government. We must make a start, and today is a great opportunity for us to proceed on a path that will save the next generation of drug users.

All parents want to protect their children, but as Mr Moodie said this afternoon, not all parents have the capacity to help their children. There is poverty in the community; many parents are users themselves and are at a loss to look after themselves, let alone their children. We have an increasing number of mentally ill people with parental responsibilities. Because of family fragmentation many people do not have the parenting skills to help them drugproof the kids.

We have the opportunity today to establish a partnership with parents, schools, communities and government agencies to drugproof our kids. It is clear to me and the Liberal Party that to change our future society and to save our children we need a multifaceted, multi-agency approach independent of government but answerable to Parliament to ensure that we have a long-term strategy and a properly monitored program

with the flexibility to change over time in tune with changes in society.

After the debate on heroin injecting rooms last year, the Liberal Party released a policy entitled 'Combating drugs — a safer way'. The document refers to the fact that the first priority should be to do everything we can to prevent young people using illegal drugs in the first place. Our aim should be to prevent drug use in future generations of Victorians. A comprehensive education campaign is necessary to inform people of all ages about the dangers of taking drugs and to identify those vulnerable to illegal drug use.

The policy talks about the Best Start program, which is designed to provide seamless support for families from pre-birth to the start of primary school.

Rob Moodie from Vichealth talked this afternoon about the significant contribution made by maternal and child health services to effective parenting, identifying children at risk and identifying early health problems in children.

The Liberal Party policy document also talked about what the party would do in schools. The Liberal Party would provide funds to conduct drug awareness seminars for all parents of children at government and non-government schools at the beginning of each year. The policy document talked about providing funding so that each secondary school would have an equivalent full-time, school-based student welfare coordinator position to handle the day-to-day responsibility of implementing the individual school's drug education strategy. It talked about professional development to assist teachers and about providing adequate funding for non-government schools so that students in the Catholic and independent school systems would have the same access to information as students in government schools.

The Liberal Party policy also talked about advertising. That was alluded to in all the contributions made this afternoon. The Liberal Party said that it would work to implement a national anti-drug strategy campaign because consistency in message is one of the greatest challenges we face.

There are some terrific programs operating in the community already and they need to be evaluated properly, enhanced, evolved and expanded to ensure that our young people have the best chance. One program that I will mention briefly is Reach Youth, which was developed and co-founded by Jim Stynes. It is based on programs designed to promote in young people the development of positive life skills, increased

self-esteem, positive self-belief and general wellbeing. That is exactly what we need to ensure that our young people are strong enough and confident enough within themselves to say no to drugs when they encounter them.

Only a coordinated response through an independent body can bring together the raft of programs already in existence in the community, not just the programs directly auspiced by the government. We need a multifaceted strategy for schools, families and the community through consistent advertising.

In my opinion, drug education should be targeted for the individual and families, to the community, including schools, and to society. It is crucial that we strengthen family relationships and provide guidance to parents to promote resilience in their children. It may take a village to raise a child but the cornerstone of society, the family, is fundamental. As Peter Wearne from the Youth Substance Abuse Service said in his contribution this afternoon, we have to support families because they are the fundamental building blocks to reconstructing a young person's life.

School curriculums should be designed to include the promotion of strong personal development, the provision of education about the health of the mind and the body and the development of high self-esteem and self-respect. This should be the focus from birth through to the end of primary school. By promoting a healthy lifestyle and a consciousness about what they take into their bodies through both food and substances the children of future generations will be armed with a natural predisposition to avoid harming themselves. This theme should be continued into the secondary years and enhanced by more specific drug education and information about the effects of all substances both licit and illicit. We need to encourage our young people to take responsibility for themselves and for their health and wellbeing from an early age, but we also need to open the lines of communication between young people and their families and teachers to ensure that they can tackle peer pressure head on.

I have had feedback from young people in secondary schools where drug counselling is available or teachers conduct drug education in the classroom. Unfortunately this is not consistent across schools as it is up to the individual teacher to decide how far they want to go in pursuing the education of young people about the risks of drug abuse. The feedback I get from young people is often that they are not comfortable in speaking to an older teacher. Some teachers do not engender confidence despite their very best efforts. An independent authority working with school

communities could help to address this hurdle and many others.

The message that drugs are not cool and you do not need them to enhance or enjoy life and that, judging by the statistics, they could kill you before your 30th birthday should be well established in the consciousness of young people as they enter adolescence. We heard today that the age of first contact with heroin has dropped from an average of 26 years in 1996 to 17½ in 1998.

We need to have a consistent message disseminated through advertising and promotion to enhance the programs undertaken at the individual and community level. We also need to promote cultural change. The example of the Transport Accident Corporation advertisements was used by Rob Moodie and Neil Comrie. In 1970, 1061 people lost their lives on the roads in Victoria and in 2000 there were about 400 deaths on the roads. The figures on drugs show that we need to turn this situation around or we are at risk of killing off our next generation. Neil Comrie talked about the fact that in 1991 there were 41 heroin deaths and in 1999 there were 359; that is a sevenfold increase. Mr Comrie predicted that if the heroin death rate continues to escalate at that rate it will be up to 2500 deaths per year by 2007. The Quit strategy under Vichealth and the TAC campaign have shown us that we can promote cultural change through advertising in our community.

It is also critical that programs be developed in a culturally effective and sensitive way to ensure that all stakeholders — parents, teachers, social workers and young people — can access relevant information. An independent authority similar to Vichealth could provide ongoing research, program development and implementation, monitoring and evaluation to coordinate the message promoted throughout the Victorian community. We need to have targeted programs for different socioeconomic and cultural groups but the overall message must be the same — it is just a matter of how we target it to get that message through effectively to save our next generation of young people.

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, known as Vichealth, was established with tripartisan support in the Legislative Council in 1987 under the Tobacco Act. It is currently chaired by Professor John Funder, and we heard from the chief executive officer, Rob Moodie, this afternoon. Vichealth is already conducting a study on cannabis which falls within its responsibility because of its relationship to smoking. The fact is that an organisation with a structure like that of Vichealth

will enable us not only to have a long-term view but also to properly evaluate all of the programs, good ideas, and innovations in our community so we can be responsive and relevant at all times.

Neil Comrie advocated the quarantining of the funds earmarked by government for this body for 10 years so that it is not just up to the bureaucrats to dish out the money as they see fit. It is important that we encourage support from business, the private sector and private donations to ensure the ongoing viability and progress of this new body. In his newspaper article Neil Comrie said that this is a long-term investment in the future of our young people. Members of the Liberal Party strongly advocate the establishment of an independent authority answerable to the Parliament, not to the Premier. We urge the government to proceed quickly with discussions on planning a structure and determining accountability, performance indicators and full funding details to pursue the establishment of this very important new body which will protect and coordinate the activities of government and the community to save the next generation of young people.

To date, far too many lives have been lost in the drugs and heroin war. I fear for future generations. I urge the government to consider carefully how it establishes the new body, how funding is made available to it and how we can ensure it remains independent with a long-term strategic focus that will impact on the future lives of all Victorians. I commend this motion and the amendment to the house.

Sitting suspended 6.31 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Youth Affairs) — As the Minister for Youth Affairs I wish to contribute to today's debate following the historic joint sitting by presenting the views and voices of young people. Seven months ago I was involved in consultations for the government's drug policy expert committee report. I hosted an all-day round-table discussion involving 48 young people aged from 15 to 19. They had been nominated by government, Catholic and independent schools and community agencies.

The round-table topic was licit and illicit drugs, abusing drugs and the prevention of drug abuse. In particular participants were asked to discuss two main questions: why do people use and abuse drugs, and what can be done to prevent drug use?

As the house is well aware from today's joint sitting proceedings, the drug issue is complex and full of diverse views that range across all sectors of the

community. There are a multitude of reasons why people engage in drug use and abuse. However, what impressed me about the young people at the forum was how quickly they recognised that they shared many views and how they were able to reach consensus on reasons for drug use. They shared a view that the issue needs an urgent response and a high priority.

They agreed that the main reasons young people use and abuse drugs are peer group pressure; experimentation; lack of support; a sense of not belonging; complex cultural and social factors; low self-esteem; and boredom. The simple issue came down to availability of all drugs in our society and the general lack of information or education on drugs, particularly for young people in families, schools and the community.

What I found especially impressive, which is the key message I want to present to the house this evening, is that young people had clear views on what needed to happen, what strategies would work and what response should come from government, secondary schools, the community and families. This raises the issue that we as adults, parents, professionals and politicians have to accept that young people are sitting in judgment of us. Honourable members learnt that lesson from today's proceedings.

In that regard our credibility as legislators, parliamentarians and politicians is on the line. Young people are certainly not fools; they know what needs to happen. We must not simply listen but must also be seen to be listening to our young people and to react accordingly.

Fortunately, we in Victoria have a good history of listening to our young people when we are developing and talking about responses to the issue of drug use and abuse. Consequently the solutions identified at the youth round table will come as no surprise to anyone. They are and were core elements of the strategies of the Bracks government and of the previous government strategies, including the Turning the Tide strategy and the present government's strategy contained in the report *Drugs: Meeting the Challenge*.

To summarise the feelings of the young people at the youth round table, they said there had to be a range of responses in schools if prevention was to be effective. Some responses have been discussed today. They include responses in schools, particularly in youth and community groups, across government, by young people themselves and by the media and parents. They strongly believe all — and I stress the word 'all' —

share responsibility for the problems as well as for the solutions.

What did young people say about schools? Community attitudes towards young people experiencing drug problems need to have more empathy and certainly more focus on what can be done to meet their needs rather than on punitive measures. They also said there is a need for comprehensive drug education in schools, commencing in year 7 before problems arise, facilitated by young people who have themselves overcome drug use and abuse. They also identified the need for independent counsellors to be employed by schools. That notion of independence relates very much to the perceived lack of confidentiality of the school-employed counsellors.

The young people said there is a need to incorporate one-on-one support counselling sessions at least once a month in the school curriculum to allow every student an opportunity to discuss relevant issues. The important element was that such an arrangement normalises the experience of counselling and overcomes what the young people saw as negative stereotypes associated with speaking to counsellors. Their concern was that somebody attending a counsellor was seen to have a problem, whereas if an arrangement was normalised as part of the school curriculum no stigma would be attached by their peers or students to counselling sessions.

The young people said that youth clubs and community groups should provide young people with an opportunity to participate in local recreational sporting opportunities. That comes as no surprise. They said it should overcome issues of boredom and increase connections with the local community. I reinforce that element of increased connection, which I have often spoken about. It can be one of the significant roles of sport and recreation in local communities. They referred to the provision of access for young people to participate in the planning and management of youth activities such as youth clubs, forums and special events.

The message, though, is that young people are expected to take control and change their lives in relation to drug use and abuse. If they are to do so we need to provide them with opportunities to do just that, to take control and responsibility, and more importantly — this is one of the significant factors reinforced at that youth round-table forum — we must take them seriously.

Young people made it clear that they should have a responsibility to become involved in forums, public speaking and similar opportunities where they can

present their views and provide positive role models to other young people. That was heartening.

When young people focused on the role of government they said, firstly, they supported government implementing a community drug education program similar to the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and anti-smoking advertisements, which were referred to a number of times today. Secondly they said prevention and education programs in schools should begin in the last year of primary school, which I thought was significant given the issues discussed today about what has become a lower age for drug and substance abuse. The programs in schools should continue each year through high school addressing the more complex drug issues as young people grow older. Finally, they said that education and information sessions should use peer educators and credible presenters who have relevance to young people and can present in a meaningful way. That translated into issues discussed today, because those campaigns are not necessarily effective. They require credible presenters and certainly peer educators.

When discussing the role of the media, youth round-table participants said they believe the media has a great power of influence over young people's attitudes and behaviour. They felt the media should play an enhanced role in educating the broader community, such as producing documentaries and real-life stories on the consequences of drug abuse. They felt the media should highlight success stories that provide hope to people trying to overcome drug abuse. That is significant.

Importantly, young people said their parents should become involved in drug education activities because there was a perception that parents lack an understanding of current drug issues. Parents need to discuss drug issues in the home in an open and supportive way. That was reinforced at the forum today. When we were young we were never confronted by these issues, but these young people are confronted by them every day in the street, travelling to or from their places of employment or education and so on, whereas their parents do not fully understand the issues surrounding the pressures that young people face and the decisions they have to make every day of their lives.

In closing I would like to provide a postscript to the youth round table on drugs. Two weeks ago at the request of the Department of Infrastructure I hosted the youth round table on the government's metropolitan strategy. More than 80 young people presented their views on Melbourne and how Melbourne's future should be planned. It became apparent at the youth

round table that young people felt that the current level of drug use reflected badly on Melbourne as a city and as a place to live. This came about firstly because they perceived health and safety issues associated with drug use in certain suburbs and secondly because they believed there should be more region-wide support and treatment services for young people experiencing drug and alcohol abuse.

These youth round tables clearly demonstrate that young people will support us in our deliberations today and want to see government, communities and families working together to find the solutions to drug use and abuse.

One of the most significant things said today was that it is not necessarily only a government problem, it is a community problem and we must work together in overcoming it. To sum up today: together we can do better.

Hon. R. A. BEST (North Western) — I am pleased to contribute to the debate. After all that has been said today and in the past and all the reports that have been provided, tonight we move towards resolving the outstanding issues between the parties and come to a position where we can move constructively to establish a body that will take us through the next 10 to 15 years.

I thank those eminent people who today addressed the joint sitting of the members of both houses. They were informative and passionate and had a view to put. I congratulate them on the way they put their views. I thank Dr Penington, Dr Moodie, David Brunt, His Grace Archbishop Pell, Professor Margaret Hamilton, Andy Hamilton and Peter Wearne for their contributions.

I shall reflect on a number of the matters put today. As I have said previously in debates on drugs, as a National Party spokesman on health I support any integrated strategic drug campaign aimed at reducing the number of drug-related deaths in our community. I say that sincerely because we have put before members of Parliament strategies that have not necessarily been integrated, they have been one-off measures aimed at providing a solution to a problem but not resolving the overall scourge we are facing in our community.

As was highlighted today by each of the speakers, the message was that we have a problem that must be confronted by people who are sick of talking. The community has great expectations of our achieving something. So far as the National Party and I are concerned, today will go down as an example of putting

forward a strategy that we believe will provide a solution and a way forward to assist the community.

It was interesting to hear Dr Penington put his views before the joint sitting. He spoke of the health issues, not the moral issues, associated with drugs. He spoke about prevention as the most important issue confronting the community in the resolution of the drug problem and suggested establishing a Premier's advisory council.

Neil Comrie on the other hand went further by reminding us that there were 49 deaths from heroin overdose in 1991 and 359 overdose deaths in 1999. He also reminded us that 70 per cent of crime that is committed is drug related. He said that the public is frightened, angry, frustrated and confused. We as legislators have contributed to that anxiety. He spoke about a strategy and establishing an authority, a model that would not only be a research institute but also look at integrating programs aimed at ensuring there is a strategic direction forward.

He suggested that it should be non-political. I agree with that sentiment, but I do not believe it should be devoid of political representation across party lines and including the three parties in Parliament.

He suggested that the authority should report to the Premier and through him to Parliament. But Dr Rob Moodie, whom I know through my membership of the Vichealth board, put forward the public health perspective. He reminded us that in the 1950s, 75 per cent of men smoked. He then mentioned how times have changed and how, through the performance of Vichealth, many of the habits that have adversely impacted on our health are also changing. He also suggested that an independent authority should be established.

David Brunt from the Salvation Army put forward compassionate views and related the sad experiences he has had with so many young lives lost. In particular he gave us a dramatic account of a funeral that he recently attended.

Archbishop Pell spoke about a long-term coordinated strategy. He focused on schools, parents and teachers because in his belief we have lost authority over the young. He reinforced the continual message of the experts who addressed us today that there will be no sudden or spectacular breakthrough and that this will be a long haul.

Margaret Hamilton, the chief executive officer of Turning Point, emphasised that parents need information so they can adequately respond. I saw that

as a very important point because one of the great dichotomies that parents face is that as their kids are growing and mixing in different circles parents are not always aware of the friends and circumstances with which their children are involved. The more education that can be provided to families, particularly parents, the better they will be equipped to respond to the issues. Margaret also highlighted the need for more efficient spending in our responses to drug taking. She reminded us that there was a link between smoking and cannabis use, and she was very strong on the issue of prevention, particularly on treatment being a part of prevention and treatment and intervention being equal partners in trying to remove people from drug taking. She emphasised strongly the need for an Australian approach — a basic yet important requirement to give us the opportunity to look across party lines to establish something very Victorian, based on the Vichealth model, to give us the potential to address and resolve many of the issues confronting us.

Anthony Hamilton, a school principal, reminded us of the problem of ad hoc funding which faces agencies when so many different organisations, whether they be schools or community organisations, compete for funding. It happens across all governments, regardless of which party is in power. Funding is for a specific program for a specific time and unquestionably there is no long ongoing strategy for a program that continues and is of long-term assistance to the health and wellbeing of the people at the school.

Peter Wearne, from the Youth Substance Abuse Service, who I thought absolutely stole the show, reminds us of the face of youth workers who are on the street confronting these problems every day. He is to be congratulated for his work. He is a wonderful example of the dedication and commitment of many different people in many agencies in many suburbs in Victoria. His message was one of compassion, of understanding, of being at the forefront, of being exposed to the very problems that confront people on a day-to-day basis. He reminded us again that people do experiment and that young people in particular who have been abused are very exposed to the problems of drug taking in later life.

His most salient message concerned the role that the media has to play in the future. He outlined clearly and eloquently that the media have a vital role in shaping this debate in the future. It can be negative or it can be very positive but as a total community, regardless of station or whether we are legislators, reporters, social workers or CEOs responsible for a range of organisations who are trying tackle this debilitating illness across our society, we have an important role to

try to ensure that the next generation is not exposed to the problems that we or our children have been exposed to, and we need to create a social environment in which young people can flourish.

As I said, I enjoyed every contribution. The speakers came from various backgrounds. It was interesting that Peter Wearne, the social worker, was sitting almost next to the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, which I thought was a lovely touch. It demonstrated clearly the dimension of the problem and how it exists across so many different stations in life. They had different messages but they were uniform in their disdain for the curse that is being experienced in our community — that of drugs and the deaths that are occurring as a result of drug taking.

However, enough of the past. I want to get on to the future because I believe the community is looking to us to get on with it. It is time to move forward and provide some real outcomes that give the community hope. As I said, I have been associated with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation since 1990. In the late 1980s the three political parties in this Parliament sat down and identified that there was a need to establish an organisation and an institution called the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. They agreed on how it would be funded and what it would set out to achieve as its objectives.

As the National Party representative since 1990 I have had the opportunity of mixing around the board table with many Labor members of Parliament. I am pleased to put on the record that I have served with Mal Sandon; Eddie Micallef, with whom I enjoyed a chat and a glass of red wine today; Bruce Mildenhall; Jan Wilson, a lovely lady who is now president of the greyhound association; and Jenny Lindell. I did not have the chance to work with Michael Arnold for any great length of time. Those members of the Labor Party have all served on the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation since its formation in 1988. I have also served with Graeme Weideman and my upper house colleague Gerald Ashman, who is still the Liberal Party representative on Vichealth. The previous National Party representative was Bill McGrath and, as I said, I have been there since 1990.

Hon. P. R. Hall interjected.

Hon. R. A. BEST — That would be lovely, Mr Hall, and it is at your discretion that I stay there!

I believe Vichealth has been an outstanding Victorian success. The model has been adopted internationally and continues to attract worldwide attention for its

achievements and the way in which it promotes health. The National, Liberal and Labor parties agreed on the formation of Vichealth. I again put on the record my congratulations to David White, the then health minister, and Mark Birrell of the Liberal Party, who worked together to ensure that it was established. They did an outstanding job and the foundation has served Victoria and Australia well. Internationally it is renowned as an outstanding provider of health information.

The problem I have with debates on drugs is that every group believes its position and its approach can solve all problems, and I include political parties. I do not question the previous government's commitment because the National Party was part of that government, which provided millions of dollars in an attempt to reduce the number of deaths from this curse on our society.

The Bracks government is committing millions of dollars so there is a similar problem. It is attracting enormous amounts of money across government departments and agencies. In the handout provided to those present in the other place today I was staggered to see the number of initiatives and programs being undertaken across departments and agencies in an attempt to solve the drug problem. It does not matter whether it is the departments relating to health, justice, education, community services, police, or youth — they are all allocating huge amounts of funds for the drug problem.

Private agencies, such as the Australian Drug Foundation, churches and Vichealth, will provide an enormous amount of money for research. The Smith Street research was telling in revealing the number of shopkeepers exposed to needles that were inappropriately disposed of. A range of other credible and competent agencies and associations are trying desperately hard to do their bit in resolving this problem. They are all providing programs that look at harm minimisation, early intervention, education, prevention, rehabilitation and detoxification. Community health centres and agencies are providing needle exchange services.

A range of government, private and semi-government agencies are working to solve this one problem. I suggest to the house today, and I am pleased to say the idea has been embraced by my National Party parliamentary colleagues, that an institute along similar lines to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation be created comprising representatives from various agencies, including the police, justice and health, agencies such as Vichealth, the Australian Drug

Foundation, churches, social workers, community organisations and government departmental representatives, plus nominated representatives from the three political parties. That would create a board of not more than 12 people. The board would have the power to create other consultative committees that would be relevant to the issues associated with drug abuse, such as early intervention, prevention, education, rehabilitation, detoxification, as well as other identified programs.

In the shower this morning I thought of a name for the organisation, VICTORY; that name will provide the inspiration to fight the problem. VICTORY is an acronym for the Victorian Institute for the Care and Treatment of Rehabilitating Youth. That centralised agency would provide a strategic framework for the fight against drugs. Like Vichealth, it would be given legislative parameters within which to work. I believe the three political parties should work now to identify the legislative framework by which this organisation should be created, and that legislation should be brought to the Parliament sometime in the spring session.

As with the Vichealth promotion, I believe the government should provide major funding for the establishment of the institute, and that funding, as with Vichealth, should be a line item in the budget each year. The reason for suggesting this model is that both the previous and current governments have provided a substantial amount of funds to tackle this most debilitating problem. The formation of the foundation would provide a focus through which all programs could be coordinated and administered. One of the major impediments we face in trying to tackle this current problem is that a range of agencies and departments undertake programs that in some cases may be duplicated and the investment being made by the government is therefore not maximised.

We must move forward. Political parties have proved in the past that they can work together if there is a real desire to achieve a meaningful outcome for all Victorians. This problem is costing Victoria millions of dollars. A coordinated strategic approach is necessary across government agencies and departments. As legislators we have an obligation to unite and tackle this curse on our community. We need to be innovative, and I urge the government to give consideration to the proposal of the National Party and the amendments that have been provided by both parties in ensuring that a foundation is created that can deliver positive outcomes for the community.

Hon. G. W. JENNINGS (Melbourne) — I am pleased on this particularly important day in the history of the Parliament of Victoria that the two houses came together to receive presentations from experts in the field of drug prevention and drug support services. One of the most significant aspects is that I am about to move an amendment to the motion moved by the Leader of the Government earlier today. It is predicated on an agreement that the amendment moved by the Honourable Maree Luckins earlier will be withdrawn by the opposition parties. On that basis there will be an agreed position adopted by the Council. My amendment states:

That all words and expressions after ‘That the Council’ be omitted with the view of inserting in place thereof:

‘ —

- (a) take note of the addresses of Mr Neil Comrie, Dr David Penington and the other expert advisers on drug education and prevention, given in the Legislative Assembly Chamber on 21 March 2001;
- (b) believes that the Victorian Parliament should support the creation of an expert drug prevention body;
- (c) totally supports the effective integration of programs through a multi-agency approach to protect our next generation of young people from drug abuse which must be achieved by implementing agreed strategies on drug and lifestyle education, early intervention and diversion; and
- (d) insists that the body must be appropriately resourced to provide direction on the effective integration of drug programs and report to Parliament.’

I am pleased to move the foreshadowed amendment to replace the motion of the Leader of the Government and the amendment currently before the house. It is an opportunity for us as a Parliament to give some meaning to the intent of what a bipartisan approach might be to the issue. I am pleased that the Parliament has been able to develop an affirming culture. It has developed that culture in the consideration of the supervised injecting facility debate that occurred last year. I am pleased that we have been able to find a path today, because a key message that a number of panel members conveyed to the Parliament is the sense that there needs to be an agreed approach that is based upon confirming the self-worth and participation of all members of this community and generating a sense of belonging. They were the underpinning philosophies, regardless of the vantage points the various experts brought to the matter. It was the common thread that was woven through their presentation when they talked about providing a solid and secure environment for Victorians to grow up in in the future and to reduce the

risks of people in Victoria assuming addictive behaviours. That was the intention.

A number of speakers looked at somewhat mechanistic ways in which that may be achieved. Neil Comrie, in answering a number of questions, indicated that he did not want to be overly prescriptive about what a body may be that takes responsibility for overseeing the integration of the services and providing direction and support to government and government programs. This resolution is not overly prescriptive, but it provides a foundation of agreement that applies within the Parliament and will underpin what we hope will be a bipartisan approach, and in fact a whole-of-community approach, to this issue.

I am pleased that on any number of occasions we heard from both the experts who gave presentations and from members of this Parliament, 'We will achieve a result by working together'. That is the way solutions need to be found. That is the spirit and tenor of the outcome of today. I look forward to, and I encourage all members of the opposition parties in the weeks, months and years to come, to join me in working productively and constructively with the government and any advisory body that is established to support these programs to achieve the outcome we are seeking in the name of future generations of Victorians.

I would like to indicate that this level of agreement about prevention strategies — and I acknowledge that it is a major challenge for us all to confront, and we all consider it to be a long-term problem — should not come at the expense of our focusing on acute problems that exist in the community. People are dying in the streets and lanes of Victorian suburbs and towns, and we must not shirk our responsibility to ensure that there are appropriate treatments and that members of our community can go about their daily lives in secure environments. In dealing with the whole level of prevention through to rehabilitation and securing an ongoing life for all Victorian citizens, this state, this Parliament and any body that is established to take charge of that important task must not lose sight of the multi-layered nature of the exercise before us. This has to be an issue that goes to the heart of affirming and validating the lives of all Victorian citizens and future generations.

If that is the sense that can come out of today, the Parliament will be much better for it. I commend the foreshadowed motion to the house.

Hon. J. W. G. ROSS (Higinbotham) — It gives me great pleasure to speak on the issues raised by the joint sitting of the houses in respect of drug abuse. I take

note of the fact that this debate began with a motion moved by the Honourable Monica Gould to take note of the issues that were raised in the other place. The Honourable Maree Luckins then moved an amendment expanding on the original motion and seeking to establish a drug education and early intervention authority.

The Honourable Gavin Jennings has now moved an amendment giving effect to an agreed position between the Liberal Party, the Labor Party and the National Party. In the spirit of tripartite cooperation that was embraced in the other place, on behalf of the Honourable Maree Luckins I seek leave to have her amendment withdrawn.

Mrs Luckins's amendment withdrawn by leave.

Hon. J. W. G. ROSS — In responding to this motion, I make the point that the advice tendered, particularly by Mr Neil Comrie and Dr Rob Moodie, explicitly mentioned the creation of a new independent authority and the need to provide a 10-year funding stream to ensure its independence. Mr Comrie expressed his great regret at the lack of coordination delivered by a succession of coordinating committees based within government. In many ways it reflects the sort of approach that was established early in the piece in the creation of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

At that stage the Honourable Mark Birrell, the Honourable Bill Baxter, the Honourable Bill Landeryou and the Honourable Graeme Weideman did a great deal of work behind the scenes to pave the way for the creation of the foundation as a genuine tripartisan arrangement. That is in fact in some contradistinction to the situation we have seen today, where there has been an attempt to achieve everything at very short notice.

I make the point that Mr Comrie was seeking a statutory authority at arm's length from the government and reporting through a board of management to Parliament. The example he gave of such an organisation was the independence enjoyed by the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman. In no way was he speaking about the series of drug coordination committees that for years have worked out of the public service and were the basis of his continuing frustration. The opposition has fully accepted the arguments advanced for a multipartite approach and is looking to the government to implement the structures recommended, root and branch.

Having accepted the recommendations of the government's experts, I would like to make two salient

points. The first is that I believe drug abuse is a symptom of a far more fundamental social problem. The second point is that demand reduction must be embedded in a much broader public health context. Indeed, in supporting the principle of using drug education as the community's only realistic long-term means of reducing demand, I issue a warning that if the programs are not carefully structured and constantly evaluated such programs have the potential to create in young people a morbid interest in illicit drugs. I believe there is ample evidence that such programs are more effective if they are integrated into a comprehensive program of health and human relationships.

In respect of the principles of multipartisan approaches, I had the opportunity to visit Sweden last year and later in the year spent some time with Ms MaLou Lindholm, who is a past member of the Swedish Parliament and a current member of the European Parliament.

During previous debates I have referred to the Swedish experience. I do not intend to refer to the matters I have raised in previous debates, but I make the point that the multipartisan approach is so deeply ingrained in Swedish society and in community attitudes that no government would have a realistic expectation of being re-elected if it breached that contract.

The main goal of the Swedish community is the pursuit of a drug-free society. I refer briefly to the document entitled, 'Drug policy — the Swedish experience', which states:

A drug-free society is a high objective expressing society's attitude to narcotic drugs: we do not accept the integration of narcotic drugs into society, and our aim is a society in which drug abuse remains a socially unacceptable form of behaviour, a society in which drug abuse remains a marginal phenomenon. A drug-free society is a vision expressing optimism and a positive view of humanity: the onslaught of drugs can be restrained, and drug abusers can be rehabilitated.

I am not so naive as to expect that such a philosophy can be readily translated into the Victorian situation. Dr Rob Moodie referred to favourable spin-offs that can accrue from programs of drug education, and that is reason enough to support the concept. I believe we have the opportunity to do more and to be one of the first jurisdictions in the world to embark on a new health program for the third millennium.

Drug abuse is one of a plethora of modern-day diseases subject to behavioural intervention in terms of prevention. I refer to cardiovascular disease, cancer, especially tobacco-related, motor vehicle crashes, youth suicide and drug abuse. In every case it is possible to mount an effective health education program for individuals in a social context.

Having said there are a variety of methods for the implementation of these programs, such as maternal and child health, parent and community development programs and early intervention treatment programs, all levels of educational institutes have recognised that a multidisciplinary approach is needed in schools. Young people spend so much time in schools that all other opportunities pale into insignificance.

The drug expert policy committee has suggested 10 per cent of the drug budget is appropriate for drug demand reduction. I would go further and say that 10 per cent of school curriculum time could be committed to dealing with lifestyle issues and primary and secondary health promotion. This would need to be complemented with sufficient numbers of student counsellors trained to recognise early warning signs. The truth is that it is at school that our society expects the next generation to be prepared for life, and this is where we should focus our main attention.

It is pointless having schools turn out a generation of numerate and literate students prepared to enter our work force if large numbers succumb to diseases such as drug abuse and suicide in the second and third decades of their lives and heart disease and cancer later on.

For these reasons I am absolutely committed to a multipartisan approach to the primary prevention of disease in all its forms. I call on the Parliament to support Mr Comrie's proposal for a multipartisan approach to the drug issue and the motion for a new authority at arm's length from government with the task of carrying out the mission I have described.

Hon. R. F. SMITH (Chelsea) — I will make a few quick points. Having been enlightened by the expert panel today on the drugs issue, I came away thinking that we have an enormous task ahead of us, but having heard the debate so far I am encouraged to believe that with tripartite agreement we may pull something off.

The Bracks government has allocated \$77 million for rehabilitation, family support programs and so on, and for that it deserves full credit. However, we should ask ourselves whether that is enough. I do not think it is. In the United States of America drug enforcement agencies have spent billions of dollars fighting drugs with little success. Their claim to fame after spending all that money is that they have reduced drug use among high school students from 20 per cent to 10 per cent, and they are happy with that.

Some honourable members have referred to a drug-free society. Perhaps that is a pipedream. Perhaps there will

always be some members of our society who will choose to use drugs. Today honourable members have emphasised that our youth are vulnerable and in danger, but they appear to ignore the reality. A significant number of professional, wealthy and well-educated people use drugs such as cocaine or ecstasy, and no education program will change their minds. They base their use of drugs on their perception of their ability to handle those drugs. With wealth and education they are able to look after themselves through diet and medical intervention.

The expert panel consisting of moralists, researchers, educators, police and streetwise youth workers all have something positive to contribute, and in part they are all right. If that is the case, an expert panel would be capable of undertaking an appraisal and analysis of what needs to be done and come up with a means of overcoming this problem. On that basis I support the amendment moved by Mr Jennings.

In addition, the panel may have a paradigm shift and decide to look outside the normal areas regarded as appropriate in handling this problem. Its members may want to examine decriminalisation of illicit drugs, the government supplying illicit drugs to registered users or cracking down on suppliers extremely hard in a way that may be outside current laws. What are some of the advantages of doing that? In my view decriminalisation may take away the profit incentive for drug users in society and save our citizens from assaults, break-ins, murders and the like.

To me that would be a significant improvement on what we currently have. I am quite frustrated — as I am sure we all are — whenever I hear of some elderly citizen who has been murdered, mugged or burgled by people looking for money for drugs and the like. Surely we have to do something about that and we can. Maybe the decriminalisation of the issue can address that.

I have a number of other points to make but time being what it is I will be circumvented. However, I must mention one of the innovative programs taking place in Frankston under the push of the current mayor, Mark Conroy. It includes having classical music played in the street. Who would have thought of that? However, it appears that in one of the heavy drug areas in Frankston it is having enormous success. Another innovative program is the issuing of Chupa Chups to people who return syringes. People can laugh and say that is a joke but surely it is a demonstration of the fact that we have to try something different and innovative. Let us hope it works.

I would be remiss if I did not make one comment about the police and their problems. I am aware of some vigilante action being pursued in my home town by different citizens because of their frustration with the police being unable to actively police the area. The police suggest that unless they have a formal complaint about an individual problem they cannot do anything about it and citizens will not lodge formal complaints for fear of retribution. It is very frustrating. I have run out of time. I commend to the house the amendment moved by the Honourable Gavin Jennings.

Hon. E. J. POWELL (North Eastern) — I am pleased to make a contribution on behalf of the National Party to this important debate. Due to the time constraints I will keep my remarks brief so other speakers will be able to make contributions. The guest speakers in the joint sitting asked for a non-political approach and that is what we are showing here today. Some amendments have been moved and in the spirit of cooperation the National Party will support the government's amendment. We need to support a motion that moves this issue forward because it is about time we started looking to the future and began a 10-year plan.

Some great contributions were made by today's experts. Because of time constraints I will not be able to talk about each of the speakers but I will refer to a couple who made some pertinent points. As a former Chief Commissioner of Police Mr Neil Comrie has often seen drug addiction first hand. He made a very significant contribution to the drug debate. After talking about his 20 years of experience with people at risk he said many dedicated people are trying to solve the drug problems. That is true.

Mr Comrie also said that 70 per cent of crime is drug related. When I first came into this house I had an opportunity to look around the Deer Park women's prison. At that stage 80 per cent of the inmates in the prison were there for drug-related crimes.

Mr Comrie said that breaking addiction will occur only when the drug user decides to stop. That is the most pertinent thing we have heard today and when they do decide to stop the support must be there. We need more detoxification, more rehabilitation and more ongoing support. All the speakers spoke about that today.

We have waiting lists for detoxification and rehabilitation in country Victoria. The Percy Green rehabilitation centre has approached me about trying to get funding for extra beds. Teen Challenge in Kyabram does not get funding from the government but does some wonderful work for up to 30 people at a time who

have drug and alcohol-related issues. The Goulburn Valley Health Service withdrawal service coordinator faces many difficulties in finding residential placements for people suffering drug and alcohol abuse. These are the sorts of issues we should be looking at if we are really thinking about how we can deal with people suffering drug addiction.

We need to make Australia a place that is not a desirable destination for drug traffickers. We need to look at increasing penalties and to have increased incarceration.

We need earlier prevention. Children need to be monitored for at-risk behaviour. We heard today from some of the speakers that smoking was one indicator of that risk; children who smoke can go on to marijuana use and then heroin use. We also heard that early prevention must take place in schools. In some places the home environment and the community cannot pick up all of these issues. Many young people do not attend churches so those areas which previously picked up these young people and the social implications are perhaps not used as much as they once were.

A speaker who made an impact on me was Mr Peter Wearne, a social worker. He said he was very fortunate to have been brought up in a loving family with two loving parents being supported by the community, but other kids do not have that advantage. I recently attended a forum in Wangaratta organised by the National Party women's executive. The forum was called 'It takes a village to raise a child' and a number of speakers talked about that concept today. Peter Wearne said that it takes all sorts of people and influences — parents, schools, churches, involvement in communities, employers, sporting facilities, the arts, relatives and the police.

There has been a lot of discussion about this challenging issue and with this motion today we start the process of moving forward and trying to overcome the drug problem in our community. Let us all work together as a community that really does care.

Hon. E. C. CARBINES (Geelong) — I am grateful to have the opportunity to make a contribution on the day of the joint parliamentary sitting on drugs. Unlike the esteemed guests we listened to this afternoon in the joint sitting I do not bring to this debate a wealth of expertise on this very important matter that affects all Victorians. I do not claim to have the answers but like many Victorians my life's experience so far as a parent, a former secondary school teacher, a member of the Geelong community and a member of Parliament

compels me to acknowledge the terrible scourge imposed on Victoria by illicit drug use.

Of course, our drug problem is not new. Illicit drugs were around and available when I was growing up in the 1970s. However, there has been an increase in the availability and type of illicit drugs in Victoria since then. Most disturbingly there has been a large increase in the number of Victorians using illicit drugs. Dr Penington quoted figures of 75 000 Australians being addicted to heroin and he estimated that three times that many are infrequent users. We heard startling statistics along the same lines from Mr Comrie.

As a former secondary school teacher in both Geelong and Melbourne I have known young people whose lives and those of their families have been seriously affected by illicit drug use. Some young people that I taught are now dead as a result of their experimentation with and subsequent addiction to illicit drugs. I have witnessed in a public place in Geelong a young woman shoot up with a baby under her arm and quickly discard the used syringe and walk away. I have found syringes in my electorate office car park.

During the election campaign in 1999 the Australian Labor Party announced its Geelong policy in the Market Square Mall in Geelong. I remember a young woman speaking to the then Leader of the Opposition, Steve Bracks, and poignantly explaining the serious effects her friends' drug use were having. She explained that she was concerned about that and that some of her friends had died due to their addictions.

Not long after I was elected, a mother visited my electorate office seeking help for her son, Daniel. I was staggered when she entered my office because I recognised her; she was the mother of a student I taught. I was horrified to learn that her son Daniel, who had once been a student of mine, had become a heroin addict. The downward spiral of his life as a result of his addiction had led him to crime and a seemingly hopeless situation. Daniel had been unable to access detoxification facilities in Geelong and was sent to Warrnambool as a result. Removed from his family and support networks in Geelong Daniel's attempt at detoxification failed and, sadly, I do not know what has happened to him now. I hope he has been able to find his way through his addiction.

It is certain that we are never very far from the presence of illicit drug use in our society. In Geelong last year one could buy a cap of heroin for \$5 which is less than the cost of a packet of cigarettes.

As the mother of two young children, my greatest fear for their future is that they will become involved in drugs. I know and expect that they will come into contact with illicit drugs early in their lives and along with every parent I hope they will be able to resist the temptation to experiment and become involved in drug use. The years ahead will not be easy for my children in that respect.

No-one in Victoria is immune to the harmful potential that illicit drugs pose to every member of our community. Every one of us is touched in some way, whether through the addiction of a family member, friend or colleague, as a victim of increasing drug-related property crime or through being injured by a discarded used syringe. The ramifications for the Victorian society as a result of the increased use of illicit drugs demand our attention. We are losing valuable lives. Today I looked at the statistics quoted in the *Herald Sun*, which indicate that already this year we have lost 11 people to heroin overdose. Homelessness has increased, as has prostitution and drug-related crime. In his speech today Mr Comrie estimated that 70 per cent of Victorian crime is drug related.

It is incumbent on all members of Parliament to show leadership on the drugs issue and to work strenuously to address it. The Bracks government takes the drug problem confronting our state very seriously. Our policy approach is four-pronged, based on prevention, rehabilitation, enforcement and saving lives. We recognise that there is no one answer to Victoria's drug problem. Our commitment to Victorians to introduce legislation allowing for a trial of supervised injecting rooms was defeated in this place last year. While not wanting to reopen that debate today, I felt an incredible frustration that Victorians were denied an opportunity to trial a system that was aimed at keeping young addicts alive.

In Geelong the government has committed to a number of strategies offering counselling to addicts. We are about to open a six-bed residential withdrawal facility and we are funding a new four-bed youth residential withdrawal unit which will be opened soon. Additional services will also be offered.

Today's historic joint sitting of the Victorian Parliament is a small but significant step in looking for a new approach to tackle Victoria's drug issues. It was evident from what was said today by the experts that there is no one solution to the problem. Today honourable members recognised that we need to work together as a community to confront this most insidious issue facing Victoria. The challenge now is to translate that recognition into action. All members of this

chamber have a duty as elected representatives of the Victorian people to ensure that that happens.

Amendment agreed to.

Amended motion agreed to.

STATE TAXATION ACTS (FURTHER MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL

Second reading

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) (*By leave*) — I seek to make a statement on the second-reading speech on the State Taxation Acts (Further Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill, which I delivered on 20 March.

In that speech I stated that the provisions of the bill proposing to amend the objections and appeals provisions of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 would apply from 'today's date'. As honourable members who have taken the opportunity to read the bill would appreciate, the relevant date is in fact 14 November 2000, the date on which the Treasurer delivered his second-reading speech in the other place.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Industrial Relations) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Planning: Bulleen drive-in site

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — I raise an issue with the Minister for Sport and Recreation in his capacity as Minister assisting the Minister for Planning. I have previously raised the issue of the Bulleen drive-in site in Bulleen Road which is part of the Yarra Valley. Significant concerns are held in the community, particularly by members of the Middle Yarra Strategic Advisory Committee and local residents, about the proposed development of a very large BBC Hardware store on that site. The matter has been going on for many years.

The previous planning minister, Rob Maclellan, appointed a panel that was chaired by Ms Helen Gibson and included other representatives, among them a local representative, Sue Course. One of the principles that the panel came up with was that there be no diminution of flow down the Yarra River through the development of any sites in that area. I should also say very bluntly

that the Manningham City Council has said it does not want the site developed for a BBC Hardware store.

My understanding is that the Minister for Planning has appointed another panel to look at the site again and that that panel is also chaired by Ms Helen Gibson. There is great concern in the community that the wish that there be no development, as expressed by the council, and that the wishes of the local residents and the local environment groups will be overridden by the minister. On behalf of the council, residents, ratepayers and the local environment groups, I seek an undertaking from the minister that he will not reverse the express intention of the council and allow a development on the site.

Mildura Special Developmental School

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — I raise a matter with the Minister for Sport and Recreation, as the representative in this place of the Minister for Education. The issue is one of urgency, relating to the new building being provided for the Mildura Special Developmental School, on which work will shortly begin. The reason that there will be a new building is that the growth in student numbers over the past few years was recognised under the leadership of the school council and parents.

The numbers have grown mainly because of the results achieved by those who work at the school, including many dedicated parents and volunteers. They have been ably led by Mrs Christine Wilson, the principal, who has been a tower of strength since the school commenced. The school has grown in size and now requires the erection of a new building. The reason for the new building is that the school has outgrown its original building. Everyone in the area is particularly proud that there will be a new building. I suggest that the school will be full of disabled students from the area before the building is finished, such is the standard of care and education and demand on its services.

Construction of stage 1, at a cost of about \$1.5 million, is expected to start at the end of this month. I am pleased that a local firm Weirs has won the contract. Stage 1 should be completed towards the end of May. Construction of stage 2, to cost around \$600 000, could follow stage 1 construction at an estimated saving of \$60 000. Everybody I talk to agrees and assures me that the money is okay, that it is there and there is no problem with it, but construction cannot proceed until the Department of Treasury and Finance announces that allocation in the economic statement, which, I suspect, will be in about July. That will be too late to allow both stages to be constructed consecutively, or to make a

saving of \$60 000, which the school would be absolutely delighted to put towards the construction of a paramedic room at a cost of about \$80 000.

My urgent request is to have the Minister for Education try to facilitate the construction of stages 1 and 2, knowing that the money is available. It is a most deserving school that could proceed with the construction of the paramedic room with the \$60 000 savings; otherwise, those savings will evaporate in extra costs.

Rail: Creswick station

Hon. D. G. HADDEN (Ballarat) — The urgent matter I raise with the Minister for Energy and Resources, as the representative in this house of the Minister for Transport, concerns the deterioration and vandalism of the Creswick railway station complex at Reed Street, Creswick, in my electorate. The 1847 railway station complex is listed with Heritage Victoria as an historically and architecturally significant set of railway buildings constructed by George Anderson for the former Victorian Railways Department.

The line is still in use by Freight Australia for the movement of freight and grain from Mildura to the ports of Melbourne and Geelong. However, the deterioration of that historic railway station complex needs to be urgently addressed. It is a sad indictment of our respect for the tradition of rail in the goldfields region, particularly in this year, the 150th anniversary of the discovery of gold in the region, and particularly as Creswick is just up the line from Clunes where gold was first discovered in Victoria in June 1851. I ask the minister to give urgent consideration to action necessary to prevent further deterioration and vandalism of the Creswick railway station complex.

Industrial relations: government policy

Hon. M. T. LUCKINS (Waverley) — I refer the Minister for Industrial Relations to my question without notice to her during question time yesterday. I asked the minister whether she or her government had a written industrial relations strategy; and if so, where was it.

Last night the minister referred me to her department's web site. For the chamber's interest, I went through the business channel of her web site. I searched the department's site and went into the industrial relations newsletter, which gave me the option of reading today's news, past news, key topics and search news. I conducted a search but, lo and behold, I found no reference to an industrial relations strategy.

I then did a full text search on the Internet, but came up with only two references to industrial relations strategies, both of which were dated 1997 when the Liberal and National parties were in government. One referred to employment AWA figures and the second was entitled 'Industrial relations strategy'. I then thought I had found it, but the industrial relations strategy headline I found on the Internet states:

Federal shadow minister for industrial relations announces Labor set to deliver a different approach to industrial relations.

The press release, dated 13 August 1997, was issued by the then federal shadow industrial relations minister, Bob McMullan. He announced a shift in industrial relations policy. I quote what he said:

We —

that is, the Labor Party —

are certainly not winding back the clock, we — —

Hon. J. M. Madden — On a point of order, Mr President, the issue is obviously federal.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. J. M. Madden — If I am allowed to finish putting my point of order, I am trying to speak above the rabble on the opposite side. Although I concede that the honourable member is talking about industrial relations, the fact that she is quoting federal policy at length is not directly related to the administration of the Bracks government.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The matter concerns the government's industrial relations strategy. Towards the end of her answer last night the minister said the strategy was available on the Internet. The Honourable Maree Luckins is telling the house she has done an Internet search to try to find the policy and is giving honourable members the result of her search. I presume that will lead to another issue of policy. I do not uphold the point of order.

Hon. M. T. LUCKINS — I reiterate for the minister's information, because he did not listen to what I said, that I searched the government's industrial relations portfolio web site, which the Minister for Industrial Relations alluded to last night. She said it held her industrial relations strategy. The search came up with a 1997 press release from Bob McMullan. I was in the middle of quoting it and now I will need to repeat it.

Hon. J. M. Madden — Do we have to hear the quote?

Hon. M. T. LUCKINS — Yes. I refer to a press release found on the Labor government's web site. The 1997 press release quoted Bob McMullan as having said:

'We are certainly not winding back the clock, we are not looking to any previous model or trying to recreate some period in the past. We are trying to create a 21st century model of industrial relations'. Nevertheless, he made it clear that Labor intended to re-establish the prominence of 'the traditional award system' and the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

I am happy to table the results of my search because it is documented. However, there is no written industrial relations strategy available on the Internet site of the Labor government. I again ask: does the minister and her department have an industrial relations strategy; if so, where is it?

Tongala Senior Citizens Club

Hon. E. J. POWELL (North Eastern) — I raise a matter with the Minister for Energy and Resources, as the representative in this house of the Minister for State and Regional Development, about the refurbishment of clubrooms for the Tongala Senior Citizens Club. As this is Senior Citizens Week it is important that I raise a significant issue for senior citizens in my electorate.

The Tongala Senior Citizens Club and the community have raised funds to purchase a building that will become its clubrooms. The club has commenced refurbishment as the current building is too small for a club with a growing membership. The club has lodged an application for funding with the Department of State and Regional Development under the rural community development scheme.

Last year an application was sent to the same organisation, but the senior citizens club was told by the department that the program had run out of funds and that its application had been rejected. Since then another application has been made with the full support of the Shire of Campaspe and members of the community; I was pleased to also have supplied a letter of support.

The local community at Tongala wants to have the refurbishment of the building completed. The building will be used not only for the club's activities but will be available for other members of the community. I have been advised by Stanley Fuller, secretary of the senior citizens club, that even the local school would utilise the club's meeting room as the school does not have a hall large enough to accommodate events involving the students, the parents and the wider community. Many community organisations have written letters of support

to say it would be regarded as a community facility rather than just a facility for the senior citizens.

The club is now waiting on the minister to approve the funding which will be so vital in allowing it to continue the refurbishment of the building. Mr Fuller has again called at my office and asked for assistance because the Tongala Senior Citizens Club is becoming quite impatient. Its members want to finish the refurbishment. The first application for funding was refused because of a lack of departmental funds; they want to know whether funds are now available.

I ask the minister to ensure that his department will process the application as soon as possible and advise the Tongala senior citizens about their funding so they can continue with their refurbishment to complete their building, which will be of benefit not only to them but to the whole community.

Cardinia: respite care

Hon. N. B. LUCAS (Eumemmerring) — The matter I raise with the Minister for Industrial Relations for the attention of the Minister for Community Services in the other place concerns the launch of the Cardinia disability respite survey I recently attended at the Shire of Cardinia. The survey was undertaken by a committee led by Ms Judy McIntyre in response to concerns about respite care, the availability of respite care and the provision of a facility for respite care to meet the needs of people living in the municipality and the region surrounding it.

At the launch I heard from a number of speakers and spoke with a number of people who expressed concern about the availability of respite care, people who have disabled relatives they look after and people who are aware of situations in the local community where a family is looking after somebody who in many cases needs 24-hour care. The survey, which was launched in February, came up with a number of conclusions and recommendations.

The survey concluded that there is great demand for respite services in Cardinia, particularly for a facility-based respite service; that the fact that there is no facility in Cardinia is of concern to those people; that in-home and respite services cannot fully meet the needs of carers in emergencies or if they require a holiday; and that a high proportion of the need for respite care occurs during the evenings and at weekends. A local facility that could provide a service in that context would be appreciated. The closest respite facility is in Hampton Park, which is some distance from Cardinia. That places further stress on families

who have to travel some distance to get to it. The committee recommended that a facility-based respite service be established within Cardinia.

I wish to raise with the minister not only the conclusions, some of which I have alluded to, but the specific recommendation and ask what action the government intends to take to address the matters raised in the report.

Electricity: Basslink

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I direct a matter to the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources. I am interested in some answers the minister gave to questions without notice during the past two days. Yesterday during question time she announced that AGL was preparing to build a new 150-megawatt power plant at Somerton, and today during question time, if I heard correctly, she said Mission Energy was planning to build a new 300-megawatt power station at the Loy Yang site.

She also spoke about new hydro power station generation facilities at Lake Eildon and said there were two such stations. I am uncertain whether each was 15 megawatts or they collectively have a total capacity of 15 megawatts. That is good news, which amounts to a total of about 480 megawatts of new generation capacity in Victoria. There may be others. I read recently that there may be a small hydro generation capacity at Lake Cairn Curran. I know Eastern Energy was considering a gas-fired power station in the East Gippsland area. I believe it is on the drawing board.

Over the past two days the minister has confirmed that Victoria will soon have an additional 480 megawatts of generation capacity. I raise this matter because my constituents in South Gippsland are concerned about the Basslink project, a 500-megawatt link between Victoria and Tasmania. With that new generation capacity that has been announced for Victoria and the fact that Duke Energy is linking Victoria and Tasmania with a proposed natural gas pipeline, there may not now be the necessity for the Basslink connection between Victoria and Tasmania.

Will the minister ask her department to investigate further whether there is now a real need for the Basslink project to go ahead, given the significant new generation capacity that has been announced for Victoria?

Racial and religious tolerance: draft bill

Hon. C. A. FURLETTI (Templestowe) — I raise a matter with the Minister for Industrial Relations, who

represents the Premier, who is also the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place. I refer to the Premier's launch on 14 December last year of the government's Racial and Religious Tolerance Bill and to the announcement last week that the government has heard the concerns of the Victorian community and the opposition in recognising the need to rewrite the model bill.

The government has obviously acknowledged that the haste with which the proposed legislation was prepared and presented constitutes a serious error of judgment. The government, the opposition and many honourable members have received a flood of correspondence overwhelmingly expressing concern about the serious and unintended repercussions —

Hon. Jenny Mikakos — On a point of order, Mr President, the honourable member appears to be debating legislation that it is anticipated will be introduced. That is inappropriate.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The rule of anticipation would apply if there were a bill before the house tonight and there was some debate on it. Mr Furletti is talking about an exposure draft in the community, therefore the rule of anticipation does not apply.

Hon. C. A. FURLETTI — The government, the opposition and many honourable members have received a flood of correspondence about the serious and unintended repercussions of the sloppily drafted and seriously flawed bill. I suggest that to all intents and purposes the bill is dead, will not be revived with oxygen and cannot be saved by surgery. The Victorian community has rejected it, and it should be buried.

Hon. M. M. Gould interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The adjournment debate gives the opportunity for a member to ask a question or to make a complaint. Mr Furletti is complaining about the exposure draft, and there is no reason why he cannot direct remarks. I ask Mr Furletti to come to the question or the complaint.

Hon. C. A. FURLETTI — I was about to, and I thought the minister may be able to contribute something.

The Premier has indicated that he will release mark 2 of the bill, which we trust will be a more balanced and less divisive document that takes into account all the views and concerns that have been expressed by the Victorian people. Within what time frame does the government intend to draft and release a new bill, and what form of

consultation will the government undertake with Victorians to ensure it gets it right next time?

Black Spur

Hon. E. G. STONEY (Central Highlands) — I seek the assistance of the Minister for Energy and Resources, representing the Minister for Transport in another place. Recently I visited Marysville where several residents approached me on the subject of the dangerous state of the Black Spur between Narbethong and Healesville. They gave eye-witness accounts of several fatal accidents they had been involved in. They gave accounts of long delays after those accidents and the lack of alternative routes because of the geographical nature of the Black Spur. In fact last weekend there was a very serious accident on that stretch of road.

It appears that the road surface has deteriorated badly, and this road gives access to commerce for the whole of the Alexandra, Eildon and Thornton area. It appears that the road surface is overloaded and worn out. I refer to the *Alexandra Eildon Marysville Standard* of 13 February, which quotes the Narbethong Tourism and Development Group, which has had feedback from tourists and locals who have experienced unsafe and stressful driving conditions on the spur. The article states:

Concerns include the slippery road surface, wrong camber and tight corners ...

The development group believes the original road foundations are failing due to the larger and heavier loads being carted through the Spur.

It also wants more slow turn-out lanes for overtaking.

I ask the minister to give priority to the upgrading of the Black Spur to assist tourism and commerce in the Marysville, Eildon and Alexandra region.

Water: farm dams

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) — I ask the Minister for Energy and Resources, who represents the Minister for Environment and Conservation in another place, to direct that minister's attention to representations that have been made to me by vegetable growers, wineries, flower producers and dairy farmers in South Eastern Province and in particular constituents comprising the South-eastern Vegetable Growers Association and the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria concerning a draft report of the Farm Dams (Irrigation) Review Committee.

If one reads the report carefully it appears that the review committee intends that commercial and industrial users of rainwater should be charged for the rainwater that falls on their properties and is stored in dams. This is of massive concern to the agricultural producers, dairy farmers and other people I have mentioned. It goes back to a longstanding tradition in our community. As I understand it, rainwater belongs to the people upon whom the rain falls. There is a song that has a line that says, 'Raindrops keep falling on my head'; the agricultural producers are worried that those raindrops will be falling on the state Treasury! It is not good enough. The rainwater is kept in dams on site before it is used. It falls on the site and is recycled and used. The report suggests there will be a potential major cost increase.

Another point in the report is that only one of seven or eight representatives on the proposed consultative committee will come from the users. Every bureaucrat you could possibly mention is likely to get a guernsey on that committee, but there is only one position for the growers themselves. In view of the fact that for the first time the people of Victoria might have to pay for their own rainwater, will the minister urgently revisit the issue of making commercial agricultural users and producers pay for rainwater and ensure that there is a very clear exemption for producers from paying for rainwater that falls on their properties?

Hampton tea-house

Hon. C. A. STRONG (Higinbotham) — I ask the Minister for Energy and Resources, representing the Minister for Environment and Conservation in another place, to direct the minister to a sorry story that is causing much frustration and anger in my local area and concerns what is known locally as the Hampton tea-house.

There is no tea-house in Hampton, but the local community and the local council have wanted to have one for some time. Over 10 years ago local residents started campaigning for a tea-house overlooking the bay at Hampton. A site was chosen — an old rubbish tip, so there would be no problems with local vegetation, et cetera, because it was refilled land. They also chose a site that had existing car parks adjacent to it because it was close to the Sandringham football ground car park, once again in an effort to cause minimum disruption to the environment on the foreshore.

The local community, which was very involved in trying to establish the tea-house, collected a petition bearing 4673 signatures in favour of the tea-house on

that site and 197 against the project, so a very significant number of local people were in favour of it.

In 1994 the Sandringham council, pre-amalgamation, approved the site and started the planning process, but unfortunately council amalgamations intervened. Commissioners were appointed, and they decided not to proceed with the issue until an elected council returned. An elected council, the Bayside City Council, duly returned and continued with the project, going through the whole approval of the concept, the planning scheme process and so on, all in consultation with the Department of Natural Resources, which owns the land, which is administered by the Bayside City Council under a management scheme.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I ask the honourable member to now pose his question.

Hon. C. A. STRONG — Mr President, I shall. In 1999 the council called for tenders to bring the tea-house project to fruition, but unfortunately it was just at the time when the government changed, and one of the first actions of the new government was to terminate the whole process, much to the disappointment of the people who had been developing it.

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

Royal Botanic Gardens: flying foxes

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — I direct a question to the Minister for Energy and Resources, who represents the Minister for Environment and Conservation in another place. I note that honourable members are getting very tired of hearing me talk about bats, but I now have another problem — tree terrorists. Honourable members may have noticed the article in the *Age* this morning headed 'Animal extremists threat to gardens', which states:

Animal extremists have warned they will cut down a tree for every bat culled in the Royal Botanic Gardens.

The threat was issued last night by an underground animal group known as Unit 14.

...

White dots were sprayed on the trees, some up to 200 years old, to show they will be the first to be cut down.

...

Yesterday an animal activist said he had been told by Unit 14 they will kill a tree for every bat that is killed.

This is serious. It is setting a very bad precedent right throughout Victoria, and it is imperative that the

minister do something about it very quickly. Will the minister provide the Royal Botanic Gardens with adequate funding to deal with the increased surveillance and police they will need for security to ensure that these trees are not cut down? I suggest that she should do something as a matter of urgency.

Gaming: machines

Hon. A. P. OLEXANDER (Silvan) — I direct to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, representing the Minister for Gaming in the other place, the issue of relocation and reallocation of poker machines within Victoria. The minister will be aware that under the regulations about 20 per cent of Victorian poker machines must be located in country Victoria or areas beyond the Melbourne statistical division. Regional gaming caps have been applied by the Bracks government on poker machines within a number of municipalities — Maribyrnong, Greater Dandenong, Darebin, Bass Coast and Latrobe — resulting in about 400 poker machines that will have to be reallocated because they are in excess in those municipalities.

Will the minister confirm whether excess poker machines from rural areas can be reallocated only to other rural areas, and if so whether the Shire of Yarra Ranges is a potential municipality for such reallocation? If it is, will the minister rule out the possibility that the Shire of Yarra Ranges will become a dumping ground for cap-created excess machines from municipalities in country Victoria?

Human Services: consultancies

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — I direct the attention of the Minister for Industrial Relations to a consultancy contract entered into by the Department of Human Services with Neil Pope, a former Labor minister. The minister may be aware of some of the details of the \$45 000 contract, which I understand involved industrial relations matters relating to workers in the Department of Human Services.

Documents obtained under freedom of information show that a file note dated June 2000 states it was inexpedient to obtain three quotes on this occasion. The normal procedure requiring the obtaining of a number of quotes for a large contract were waived by the department. The industrial relations branch of the Department of Human Services had carriage of the matter, and freedom of information documents, including one signed by Tim Lee, the assistant director of the industrial relations branch of the department, reveal that the consultancy contract was let and that those facts are correct.

Given that this \$45 000 consultancy was awarded to a former Labor minister without the proper policy procedures being adhered to, I ask whether the minister's department was aware of this consultancy. Was the minister's department consulted on the consultancy? Does the minister know whether her department had contact with the industrial relations branch of the Department of Human Services regarding this consultancy?

Gaming: machines

Hon. K. M. SMITH (South Eastern) — I address a matter to the attention of the Minister for Sport and Recreation as the representative in this place of the Minister for Gaming. I refer to what I consider to be probably one of the greatest cons pulled on the Victorian public for a long time, the so-called cutback in the number of gaming machines in the Bass Coast shire. One of the bullyboys of politics in the other house, the member for Gippsland West — —

Hon. J. M. Madden — On a point of order, Mr President, I would like to point out that making remarks of that sort about an honourable member in the other place who is not in a position to defend herself is not in keeping with the practices of the house.

Hon. K. M. SMITH — On the point of order, Mr President, the fact that I may call the honourable member for Gippsland West a bullyboy does not detract from the fact that she has called a number of members of Parliament bullies, as she is reported as doing in yesterday's *Herald Sun*. I do not think there is anything wrong with calling the honourable member a bullyboy in this house.

The PRESIDENT — Order! On the general point, certainly if an offensive remark is made about a member of this or the other chamber the house will react to that matter. However, the remark has to be particularly offensive. I understand from newspaper reports that the honourable member has used that appellation to describe other members of Parliament. Whether calling the honourable member a boy makes a difference, I am not sure. I do not uphold the objection, but the general point made by the minister is correct if the remark goes over the line.

Hon. K. M. SMITH — A great deal of pressure was put on the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority to reduce the number of machines in the Bass Coast shire. Unfortunately the casino authority looked only at the number of permanent residents in the shire and took no account of the number of people who when in the area for a weekend or over the Christmas or Easter

break go to the clubs and the two hotels that have a small number of machines.

Originally there was talk of 68 machines being removed from the area, with 17 to come out of the Wonthaggi Workman's Club, 16 from the Phillip Island Returned and Services League club and 17 from the Wonthaggi Club. It is absolutely ludicrous to propose that that number of machines should come out of that area. It would make those clubs no longer viable, and without doubt it would put jobs at risk in the Bass Coast shire.

The final number of machines to be removed is 41. I say to the minister that 41 machines out of 261 is a small percentage. This was going to be the be-all and end-all. It was going to stop problem gambling in the shire of Bass Coast. If the minister wants to read some of the press releases the honourable member for Gippsland West put out about how this was going to solve the problem, he can come and see me later.

There is no way known that that was going to stop the problem. The Kennett government put in place a number of measures to help problem gamblers, including G-line. That was a worthwhile initiative, not knocking back the number of poker machines — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I ask the honourable member to pose his question of the minister.

Hon. K. M. SMITH — Can the minister provide an understanding of whether the area being classified as a tourist area was taken into account when knocking back 41 pokies? How much influence did the honourable member for Gippsland West have on that decision? It is not good enough for the people of Bass Coast shire. It is a disgrace.

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

AFL: Melbourne-based clubs

Hon. P. A. KATSAMBANIS (Monash) — I direct a matter to the attention of the Minister for Sport and Recreation. No doubt because of his experience the minister will understand the important place Australian Rules football has in Melbourne and Victorian society, especially the Australian Football League clubs. I seek an assurance from the minister that he will use his good offices to ensure that the 10 AFL clubs currently based in Melbourne will continue to be based in Melbourne in the immediate future.

Hon. M. M. Gould interjected.

Hon. P. A. KATSAMBANIS — The Minister for Industrial Relations, who is a North Melbourne supporter, may be quite interested in the answer, so I would like the opportunity to ask my question. I seek an assurance from the minister that he will use his good offices to ensure that the 10 clubs currently based in Melbourne will continue to be based in Melbourne in the future.

Responses

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Industrial Relations) — The Honourable Maree Luckins raised with me a matter she also raised at question time yesterday, when I referred her to the ALP site on the Internet to locate the industrial relations policy the Labor Party took to the last election. As a result of great efficiency on the part of the ALP, that is now no longer — —

Hon. M. T. Luckins — On a point of order, Mr President, my question yesterday and my question tonight referred to the government and the minister having an industrial relations strategy in written form and I asked where it was. I was not asked to refer to the ALP Internet site last night. I was asked to refer to the government site, which I did, and that is what my question referred to. My question referred to the government's industrial relations strategy. Is it written down and where is it? I ask the minister to finally answer the question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I think the minister's very quick response last night was that it was on the Internet. I cannot recall any reference to either the government or party Internet sites. Perhaps the minister can clarify that position.

Hon. M. M. GOULD — I was doing that. I said last night as an interjection or a response to a comment that Mr President made that it is on the Internet. As I said, it is on the ALP site and for greater efficiency it can be taken off. I am sure the honourable member can get a copy from the library.

The Honourable Neil Lucas asked me to raise a matter with the Minister for Community Services about Cardinia respite care. I will refer that to the minister and ask her to respond to him in the usual manner.

The Honourable Carlo Furletti raised a matter for the Premier, and I will ask him to respond in the usual manner.

The Honourable David Davis raised a matter with respect to the Department of Human Services entering into a consultancy and that he has information through

freedom of information about engaging Neil Pope. Neil Pope has done much work for businesses and the current federal coalition and is very experienced in consulting and assisting in mediations and disputes. My office was advised that the Department of Human Services is going down that track.

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) — The Honourable Dianne Hadden asked the Minister for Transport to consider as a matter of urgency what action is required to prevent the further deterioration and vandalism of the historic Creswick railway station. I will refer that request to the minister.

The Honourable Jeanette Powell asked the Minister for State and Regional Development to ensure that the Department of State and Regional Development processes the application for facilities funding from the Tongala Senior Citizens Club as soon as possible and notifies the club of the outcome of that funding application, which it is hopefully anticipating will be favourable. I will pass that request to the minister.

The Honourable Peter Hall referred to a number of matters that I have addressed in response to questions without notice, specifically the proposals from AGL and Mission Energy to build further gas-fired power generation stations in Victoria. He also alluded correctly to the fact that the government is aware of a number of other proposals that are not public at this stage; they are potential developments. These proposals, as I indicated earlier, need to go through planning processes. They are proposals at this stage as distinct from the Eildon recommissioning, which is already in place.

In relation to the related matter of Basslink and its potential contribution to meeting electricity supply in Victoria, as has been indicated on earlier occasions, this proposal, which is a competing proposal with the others that have been referred to, is also going through a planning process. The government has indicated that this proposal, which is being auspiced by the Tasmanian government, must go through those planning proposals. It is undergoing that process and the government will not intervene.

As to its potential contribution if it does negotiate those planning processes in whatever form it might go ahead, it would certainly be in competition with proposals that are known about publicly and other potential proposals. The fact of the matter is we have a competitive national electricity market where private investors have to put forward proposals and take their chances. At this point I do not wish to make any further statements about the contribution Basslink might make to Victoria's

electricity supply. That is very much dependent on whether it goes through the relevant planning approvals in Tasmania and Victoria. The commonwealth is also a party to those processes.

The Honourable Graeme Stoney asked the Minister for Transport to consider upgrading the Black Spur stretch of road. I will refer that matter to the minister.

The Honourable Ron Bowden asked the Minister for Environment and Conservation to consider the recommendations of the farm dams report in relation to impacts on commercial growers and industry users. I will convey that request to the minister.

I am sure if the Honourable Chris Strong had had a little more time he would have requested the Minister for Environment and Conservation to review the department's decision to curtail the planning processes relating to the Hampton tea-house proposal. If that request is close to the mark, I am sure the minister will examine it.

The Honourable Andrea Coote asked the Minister for Environment and Conservation to give urgent consideration to providing the botanic gardens with additional resources to provide security to protect the gardens from terrorist threats to cut down trees. I will certainly convey that request to the minister.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I am happy to refer the matter raised by the Honourable Bill Forwood to the Minister for Planning in the other place. It concerned the Bulleen drive-in and BBC hardware store site on Bulleen Road and the potential impact on the Yarra Valley.

The Honourable Barry Bishop referred to stage 1 of the Mildura special developmental school and the funding for stage 2. I am happy to refer that to the Minister for Education in the other place.

The Honourable Andrew Olexander referred to the relocation of gaming machines across rural Victoria. I am happy to refer that to the Minister for Gaming in the other place.

The Honourable Ken Smith referred to the number of gaming machines in the Bass Coast Shire. I am happy to refer that to the Minister for Gaming in the other place.

The Honourable Peter Katsambanis referred to Australian Football League (AFL) clubs in Victoria. As honourable members have seen, in recent years the AFL has developed a national game and can and will administer it as it wishes. However, the government

will continue to work to promote all sports in this state, in particular, participation and access for spectators which will translate into enhancing great sporting outcomes for all sports whether they be at grassroots or elite levels.

Hon. P. A. Katsambanis — On a point of order, Mr President, my question was very specific. I asked the minister whether he will use his good offices to ensure that the 10 existing AFL clubs in Victoria will continue to be based in Victoria in the near future. The minister has the ability to canvass the question rather widely, but he did not address my question at all. I seek a comment from the minister on my question, not on some generality.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — On the point of order, Mr President, I believe I have answered the question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The question is not directly within the minister's responsibility. He can certainly use his influence in relation to the issues, but I do not think we can take it any further than that.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 10.09 p.m.

Wednesday, 21 March 2001

The SPEAKER (Hon. Alex Andrianopoulos) took the chair at 3.07 p.m.

JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT

Drugs: education and prevention strategies

The SPEAKER — Order! The time has arrived for members of the Legislative Assembly and members of the Legislative Council to sit together to hear addresses by Dr David Penington, Mr Neil Comrie and other expert advisers on drug issues.

Members of the Legislative Council entered Assembly chamber.

The SPEAKER — It gives me great pleasure to welcome Mr President, the Honourable Bruce Chamberlain, and members of the Legislative Council to the Legislative Assembly.

Serjeant-at-Arms escorted advisers into chamber.

The SPEAKER — It gives me great pleasure to welcome to this joint sitting of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council our esteemed and expert guests, who will speak on drug education and prevention.

I welcome Dr David Penington, the chair of the Drug Policy Expert Committee; Mr Neil Comrie, the former Chief Commissioner of Police; Dr Rob Moodie, the chief executive officer of Vichealth; Major David Brunt, from the Salvation Army; His Grace Archbishop George Pell, from the Catholic archdiocese of Melbourne; Professor Margaret Hamilton, the director of Turning Point; Mr Andy Hamilton, the principal of Heatherhill Secondary College; and Mr Peter Wearne, a youth worker from the Youth Substance Abuse Service.

Honourable members applauded.

The SPEAKER — The procedure set down for this debate is that I will now invite Dr David Penington, and then Mr Neil Comrie, to address us for 20 minutes, and all other guests to address us for 5 minutes. At the conclusion of that an opportunity will be given to all honourable members to ask questions of the expert witnesses for 30 minutes. Without further ado I now invite Dr David Penington to address this gathering.

Dr PENINGTON — Mr Speaker, Mr President, Premier, Leader of the Opposition and members: thank you very much for the privilege of addressing you on a very important issue.

The seriousness of the illicit drug problem and its consequences for the Australian community are not in dispute. After repeated inquiries in this state most of the facts are well established, but still the issue arouses strong feelings, and these get in the way of rational decision making. Some people have firm views and are reluctant to examine the facts.

Until now we have not had consensus across Parliament as to the direction we should take. If common ground can be found, there is a real opportunity to give leadership and to make an impact on the distress being experienced by our community.

Use of substances which alter the mind has been part of human society for thousands of years. I speak of alcohol, opium, cannabis, cocoa or tobacco leaves or, for that matter, the many prescription drugs that are currently widely used to combat anxiety or to relieve tension. Many societies have adjusted by taking steps to deal with the consequence of excessive or harmful use of drugs. Some fundamentalist Islamic societies still prohibit alcohol, as did the United States in 1919 after many years of lobbying by the anti-saloon movement. By 1933 prohibition of alcohol was judged by America to have been a failure but ended only after a highly contentious public debate in which such phrases as 'sending the wrong message' were often used.

International agreement to curb trade in opium dates from the Shanghai conference of 1909 led by President Teddy Roosevelt, with further elaboration and extension many times over the years. Prohibition has been at the core of these treaties led by the United States throughout. It is repeatedly acknowledged by the United Nations drug control program that world production of illicit drugs has mounted inexorably despite the treaties and is currently at an all-time high. It is estimated that international trade in illicit drugs in 1996 was greater than US\$400 billion.

South and South-East Asia are the principal world sources of opium and, hence, heroin. Australia is the nearest wealthy country, with a GDP greater than that of the entire South-East Asian community. We are inevitably at risk.

We would all wish to live in a society free from the effect of drugs. Some cling to the view that there must be a simple answer to achieve this. However, I can assure you that there is no country in the world with a simple, effective answer. In no country does law enforcement prevent entry or use of drugs. In those with a death penalty for trafficking the problem continues. Some countries suppress evidence of use but

have increasing deaths from drug overdose. The key issue is how to reduce the demand for drugs.

In 1985 all Australian states endorsed a federal policy framework. This is still current and has three arms: efforts to reduce the entry or availability of the drugs; strategies to reduce demand through education; and policies to minimise the harm caused to users and to society by the drugs.

The greatest proportion of government expenditure throughout has been on law enforcement, but deaths from heroin overdoses continue to mount. With persons aged between 15 and 44 years there were 1.38 deaths per million in 1964 and 63.5 per million by 1996, and those deaths continue to mount. There are an estimated 75 000 dependent users of heroin in Australia and probably three times that number of intermittent users.

A 1998 commonwealth survey reported 2.7 million Australians — mostly young people — as having used cannabis in the previous 12 months. Brief periods of shortages of heroin and other drugs occur from time to time, but those drugs are generally available in every major city and throughout regional Australia.

Five years ago I warned this house that unless we took a new approach to cannabis, including a realistic and strong health-based campaign against excessive and harmful use, we would see more and more young people move from cannabis to heroin because heroin was becoming cheaper.

Sadly, this is exactly what has happened in the past five years. We are one of the few communities in the world in which the age of initiation into heroin is falling rapidly, now starting with young people in their mid-teens.

In 1996 concern over sending the wrong message led to no change in the approach to cannabis. No effective health-based campaign against abuse was mounted. However, the Victoria Police, led by Neil Comrie, subsequently instituted the cannabis cautioning trial. From this has developed the important national diversion program for all drugs. It has largely taken the offence of possession and use of cannabis away from the courts into the realm of counselling — an important part of what we were seeking.

The excessive and regular use of cannabis undoubtedly causes problems, including the potentiation of latent psychiatric disease. However, when considering the attitudes of young people it must be remembered that the commonwealth's figures on drugs in Australia for 1997 show that there was a total of more than 22 700 deaths. Of these, 18 200 were ascribed to

tobacco use and 3700 to the hazardous and harmful use of alcohol. The remaining 800 or so were attributed to illicit drug use, of which only 1 was ascribed to cannabis.

If we want to influence young people we must talk about cannabis as a health issue, not as a moral crusade. A very important schools drug education program was mounted following the 1996 report called *Turning the Tide*. It developed progressively over three years. It now involves every state and Catholic secondary school in the state and over 85 per cent of the independent schools. Much outstanding work is under way, and it is still developing. The work of the Drug Policy Expert Committee in 1999–2000 covered the full gamut of issues — prevention, law enforcement, treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration of former users into the community. It looked at primary prevention by seeking to reduce drug use, and at secondary prevention by working with some of those 2.7 million young people who have already used drugs despite their legal status, and it also tackled tertiary prevention by working with dependent users with the aim of getting them into whatever type of treatments or rehabilitation that may in time rescue them from drug dependency.

Media interest was confined almost entirely to the proposed trial of supervised injecting facilities — a strategy to deal with an urgent situation in five metropolitan areas. This matter has now been resolved in Parliament and I do not wish to reopen it.

Many other aspects of the drug problem remain critical. Deaths and drug-related crime continue to increase. Early in 1999, the Ross Trust approached me and offered assistance. I saw prevention as the highest priority and support was given to review evidence from around the world of factors contributing to drug use and drug dependency. The project involved behavioural science at the University of Melbourne and the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and later La Trobe University and the Centre for Adolescent Health. It culminated in a workshop held over two days in July 2000 jointly with the Drug Policy Expert Committee, with participants from around Australia and a leading international figure from Sweden, Dr Robin Room, who has had extensive experience in North America and Scandinavia.

Much is known about the causes of drug dependency, including cultural, social, behavioural and even genetic factors. There are stages of transition in life that carry particular risk. There are recognised protective factors. Young people must be monitored and supported. Understanding all of these issues is fundamental to prevention. 'Just say no' campaigns consistently fail. It

is clear that school programs on their own achieve little. Parents and local communities must be mobilised to influence behaviour and to influence peer pressure. Early signs of risk and behaviour disturbance must be tackled and families must be part of any such endeavour.

At the end of August a discussion paper was sent to every school in the state, to every local council, to every parent organisation we could find, to every church and religious group identified, and to youth organisations. It was seen as an important source of information for local government drug action plans across the state. The media took absolutely no interest as it was not controversial, and many are unaware of its existence.

Given the success of the cannabis cautioning program and diversion, legislation on cannabis need not be changed in the near future. Vichealth is currently assisting in the preparation of a strong campaign against the harmful use of cannabis. The use of cannabis for medical purposes by people suffering painful terminal cancer, late-stage AIDS or some neurological conditions with troublesome muscle spasm has been supported by the House of Lords in the United Kingdom and the American Academy of Medicine and has been approved following referenda in a number of states in the United States of America. It need not entail legislation here. As we recommended in our final report last year, police and courts can exercise discretion.

Legalisation of drugs is not a current option while demand is out of control. A trial of prescription heroin for those for whom other forms of treatment have proved ineffective, which had bipartisan support in 1996, is not currently an option. It should be reconsidered after a further review of new treatment approaches.

Our committee was of the view that its work needs to be followed by the establishment of an independent review body to monitor progress. That is in recommendation 5.3. Such a body might be termed a Premier's drug advisory council or even a Victorian drug prevention council. It should have access to information from relevant sources, such as the departments covering health and community services, education, youth affairs, and justice, and also from the police and the Coroner's office. Each of these agencies will need to continue to mount programs within government services.

The new council should maintain close liaison with local government throughout the state and support the preventive initiatives being undertaken in schools and

local communities. It should monitor potential developments for treatment and rehabilitation that are expected to become available in the next few years with the growing knowledge of the reward pathway of the brain and of drugs that can influence addictive behaviour.

Such a council would need to have a chief executive officer and support staff. It would have, desirably, an independent chairperson who had a knowledge and understanding of the issues. It could have legislative status comparable to Vichealth and, like that body, include members of Parliament from both sides of the house in addition to people with appropriate expertise. Like Vichealth, it should report to the Premier and annually to the Parliament.

Mr Speaker, I commend these matters for your consideration.

Honourable members applauded.

The SPEAKER — I now invite Mr Neil Comrie, the former Chief Commissioner of Police, to address the chamber.

Mr COMRIE — Mr Speaker, Mr President, Premier, Leader of the Opposition and members of Parliament: I am honoured to be provided with this unique opportunity to address a joint sitting of Parliament. I certainly understand the significance of such an event and I thank the leaders of the parties for providing this opportunity.

The abuse of illicit drugs has become the most significant social issue confronting our community. There has been a lot of commitment and investment in addressing the problem to date and there are many dedicated people involved doing their best to reduce the impact of drug abuse. Despite this dedication and investment the problem is getting worse.

In 1991, 49 heroin-related deaths occurred in Victoria. In 1999, 359 heroin-related deaths occurred in Victoria — a sevenfold increase in eight years. If we extrapolate these figures it can be seen that we could be facing 2500 deaths by 2007. I am certain everyone here today would agree that that is too horrible a situation to contemplate.

In 1996 the average age of first-time users of heroin was 26.1 years. By 1998 that age had fallen to 17½ years. Non-fatal overdoses attended by the Metropolitan Ambulance Service in 1998 averaged 5 per day; by 2000 they were averaging 11 per day.

There is now a strong body of research that says about 70 per cent of all major crime is drug related. Our community is increasingly becoming victims of the drug problem in one of three ways: they have lost a family member or a friend to drug abuse; they have been the victims of crime committed to support an addiction; or they pay inflated insurance premiums to cover the cost of drug-related crime.

Our community is also confronted with drug trafficking and associated problems and is greatly concerned about the health risk of discarded syringes. As a consequence the community is frightened, angry, frustrated and confused.

It wants strong leadership in dealing with the problem. There has been a great deal of debate about the most effective approach to the drug problem for several years, but little progress has been made in real terms. Clearly the problem continues to worsen. The debate to date has largely focused on symptoms of drug abuse and treatment options. Ongoing debate on supervised injecting facilities, heroin trials and the legalisation or decriminalisation of illicit drugs have been emotive and have resulted in polarised views. Sadly, real progress has been stifled because of these conflicting views. This debate on controversial issues has consumed much time and energy, but the reality is that once addiction occurs it is extremely difficult to overcome. Breaking an addiction will only occur when the individual makes a conscious decision to give drugs away. While addicted the probability is the addict will overdose and may die. He or she may also commit crime to acquire cash to support the addiction which in some cases is as much as \$400 a day. We must acknowledge that at this time we do not have the answers to beat addiction on a substantial scale.

Unless we take some different approach the number of addicts will continue to grow. In simple terms the drug problem is a consequence of the supply and demand cycle. This means that while we have demand we will always have supply to meet that demand. Despite the best endeavours of law enforcement over many years, we simply must concede that we cannot totally prevent the entry of drugs into Australia. This reality is best demonstrated here in Victoria where, despite the fact that Victoria Police last year was responsible for half of the arrests in Australia for heroin trafficking, the problem continues to grow.

International trade would grind to a halt if we thoroughly searched every shipping container entering our ports. At the other end of the scale we have people called mules who swallow heroin-filled condoms overseas, fly to Australia and pass the condoms here.

These desperate measures and massive logistical problems cannot be overcome to reduce supply.

We now have an attractive marketplace for international drug traffickers because our addicts demand supply to feed their addiction. The only means of breaking the cycle of supply and demand is to reduce demand and make Australia an unattractive marketplace for traffickers. Demand will only reduce when people are able to decline the temptation to engage in drug abuse or we can break the cycle of drug abuse in the early stages before addiction takes hold.

The three key strategies in achieving this situation are education, early intervention and diversion. These strategies must support our current commitment to strong law enforcement and treatment programs. They are not alternatives but critical components of a holistic approach to the drug problem.

There is strong anecdotal evidence that children likely to be at risk from drug abuse can be identified during their schooling. It is critical that at-risk children be identified and provided with support and treatment if necessary. Some argue that this is a parental responsibility, which may be valid in some cases, but this argument assumes all parents are responsible and capable and ignores the fact that some children these days have parents who themselves are addicts. Some children have little or no influence in their lives from family or the church. Therefore the school environment is often the only stable environment where at-risk behaviour can be assessed.

To this end we must provide a resource, not necessarily a teacher, in each school who can recognise at-risk behaviour. This person must have access to other support mechanisms to which they can refer the child. Those support mechanisms must be capable of immediate response and be able to provide ongoing support.

Victoria Police has clearly established that early intervention works for those not yet addicted. We introduced cautioning programs supported by assessment and treatment in 1997. The results to date of this program have been most encouraging. An external evaluation of the cautioning program indicated a 73.3 per cent success rate in that in these cases the offenders did not come under police notice again for drug offences during the evaluation period. By diverting about 8000 people per year early in the cycle of drug abuse it is now firmly believed that the majority of these people will break that cycle and not become addicts requiring long-term treatment and rehabilitation.

The benefits to the community of this achievement are substantial: reduced drug-related crime, reduced drug-related deaths, reduced serious health problems, with an associated significant reduction in the costs of residential treatment and rehabilitation.

One case study in Victoria clearly demonstrates the potential for early intervention and diversion programs. A 15-year-old girl was found by police in the early hours of the morning with a heroin-loaded syringe ready to inject. It was discovered that this child was an incest victim, had been the victim of rape on four occasions, had been reported missing on 23 occasions and had attempted suicide four times. She was diverted from the criminal justice system into a system of support and treatment. Her previous bleak outlook has, at last report, improved considerably.

However, getting full value from the diversion program is limited by inadequate access to assessment and treatment services. The value of early intervention and diversion is now recognised nationally, and other jurisdictions have followed Victoria's lead. The federal government has now funded diversion programs, but despite the recognition of the enormous value and potential of early intervention and diversion strategies we simply do not have these services available for all who need them. There are extensive waiting lists at many counselling and treatment services. This is a serious problem, as many cases require an urgent response and effective intervention is more likely where the response is immediate. This immediate response will invariably require follow-up and in some cases long-term support.

Likewise, many children in our schools still do not have access to adequate or appropriate drug education programs. Some of the programs currently presented are of questionable value, and some are based on religious and moral philosophy rather than on real learning value. Victoria Police currently has about 65 school resource officers in the police schools involvement program who attend some 200 schools across the state. We need a broader and more comprehensive program that reaches every child in every school in Victoria.

There is an urgent need to identify an existing education program or develop a new program that effectively educates our children about the dangers of drug abuse. This program must provide our children with the knowledge to enable them to make informed decisions about whether they wish to experiment with drugs. Once they are better informed about the physiological dangers of such abuse they are less likely to go down this path.

We need to look no further than the outstandingly successful road safety education program in Victoria for evidence of what can be achieved. A bipartisan, well-resourced and high-profile education program has provided a much more responsible generation of young drivers insofar as drink-driving and general road safety are concerned. Our community has benefited from the saving of thousands of lives and the prevention of countless serious injuries, as well as a financial saving of billions of dollars in our health system. In 1970 there were 1061 road deaths in Victoria; 30 years later that is down to 400.

Education has played a major role in this life-saving strategy. There is no reason why such an education program for our whole community, but especially for our younger generation, would not have a similar impact. It must be a concerted, coordinated, consistent, high-quality and long-term program that can be progressively evaluated, not a set of ad hoc, uncoordinated and short-term arrangements such as we currently have in place.

In my view a failure to commit ourselves to this program of education, early intervention and diversion would be serious neglect and would result in a heavy price being paid by future generations. We cannot procrastinate about this critical matter any longer, nor can we allow political, moral, religious or other differences to continue to polarise our views and stifle real and meaningful action. Put simply, the wellbeing of our future generations is in our hands today.

While I am prepared to readily concede that the political process in our democratic society has traditionally served us well, the political process is, in my view, no longer appropriate for dealing with the critical issue of drug abuse. The impact of drug abuse now demands a response that rises above political considerations and takes account of community needs and expectations.

I doubt very much whether honourable members of this Parliament would individually have great difficulty in accepting the real opportunities offered to us in combating drug use through education, early intervention and diversion. However, the political process has effectively stifled progress down this path. Instead, we have been using a great deal of our time and energy arguing about treatment models such as supervised injecting facilities, heroin trials and legalisation and decriminalisation.

We have certainly identified the issues we cannot agree on, and we have experienced highly polarised views and emotive debates on these issues. But these debates

are largely about dealing with the symptoms of the problem — how we deal with people after they become addicted. It is now time to direct our attention to the causes of the problem. How do we stop these young people from becoming addicted in the first instance? This is such a basic, non-controversial and non-confrontational question that we have to ask ourselves why we have so far failed to come to grips with it. If we accept this position we must now use this unique and important opportunity we have today to face the challenge.

I firmly believe there is a way forward — a way that can embrace the whole community and provide Parliament with an opportunity to take a leadership role in challenging the drug problem. However, to overcome the restrictive barriers imposed by the political process a new model of managing our response to the drug problem is required. This model must also eliminate existing bureaucratic complexity and substantial coordination problems.

The political process creates a number of problems in managing an effective response to drugs. Party politics sometimes requires members of Parliament to vote against something they personally believe in. The delivery of policy commitments is often restricted to the time frame established for a term of government. Therefore, long-term strategies are difficult to implement and sustain, and there is an expectation that there will be short-term dividends on major policy commitments.

Government priorities often fluctuate as a consequence of political imperatives. What is required now is a long-term strategy whereby both an ongoing commitment and the allocation of vital resources are guaranteed. Given that it has taken 30 years for our drug problem to become entrenched, I consider that we must commit to a 10-year strategy to turn the problem around. For these reasons I believe Parliament is the appropriate body to make this commitment and to oversee the implementation and maintenance of this strategy.

The new strategy must also address the problems created by the present bureaucratic arrangements for addressing the drug problem. In short, these problems are as follows. Several government departments and agencies independently submit annual bids to the expenditure review committee (ERC) for drug-related initiatives. These bids are not effectively coordinated with the broad strategy. Changes to ERC and departmental priorities militate against guaranteed continuity of funding.

Most services provided in early intervention diversion programs are provided by non-government organisations (NGOs), and they depend on certainty of funding to guarantee ongoing service delivery. They do not have that certainty. Annual funding grants by departments to NGOs cause a considerable waste of valuable resources in the preparation and assessment of bids. Therefore, a new approach to managing valuable and scarce resources must have the feature of operating outside the political and standard bureaucratic processes to achieve the major goals established by a 10-year strategy. In my view this requirement could best be met by the creation of a new independent authority that would report directly to Parliament.

There are a number of existing precedents within Australia that could be examined as models for this accountability process. One overseas model provides an excellent basis for consideration — that implemented by the Blair government in the United Kingdom in 1998. That model addresses many of the concerns and barriers to progress that I have spoken about today. A workable model that would offer the best opportunity for success would have the following features.

Firstly, it would undertake research into what information and education programs are effective for different target audiences, such as children, parents, grandparents, teachers and carers. This will ensure young people are empowered through knowledge to make informed life decisions when confronted with the opportunity to be involved with drugs. It will also ensure that those who can influence their decision making and provide them with appropriate information are given the tools, information, confidence and skills to do so.

Secondly, it would undertake research into effective means of identifying young people at risk and establishing effective countermeasures to negate that risk. This body should also undertake research into establishing effective early intervention strategies when young people unfortunately make poorly informed life choices involving the use of drugs. The body should also establish strategic plans for the most effective delivery of education and information programs, the identification of young people at risk, the implementation of risk-reduction programs and the provision of early intervention programs. It should provide those programs either directly or through third-party private or public agencies.

This body should also accredit programs, register third-party agencies and provide a quality assurance and audit function for the use of funds in research and the delivery of programs. There is a need for that

authority to have legislative powers to undertake the functions that are both facilitative and regulatory. There is a need for that authority to be able to acquit public, community and private sector funds to support the programs. This must be done in a way that ensures community and private sector contributions are protected from political and undue bureaucratic interference so that the ongoing confidence of those who are investing in the program is maintained. However, it must also allow government to satisfy the required stewardship accountabilities demanded by Parliament of public expenditure.

There is a need for the authority to be seen as independent of party politics if it is to draw on non-government support and it is to fiercely and objectively provide the most appropriate education, at-risk identification, risk reduction and early intervention programs.

There is a need for all public expenditure on those areas to be acquitted through the authority to ensure a whole-of-government approach for research, planning and delivery functions, and that their implementation is integrated and fully coordinated across the public, community and private sectors.

The model that I propose to best meet the requirements is a statutory authority to be established to report directly to the Premier, but with a similar independent status to that of the Auditor-General or the Ombudsman and with a similar charter of responsibility to the Parliament rather than the office of a particular minister of the Crown. The moneys currently expended through departmental budgets on research, planning and the delivery of awareness and training programs, young people at risk, identification and risk-reduction and early intervention programs should be redirected to the authority as its establishment budget.

The funds should be quarantined from the normal budget process and maintained as a minimum base for a reasonable period — say, 10 years — to enable the authority to realistically address its charter. The authority should be charged with seeking to supplement these base seeding public funds with community support and private sector funds and additional government funding through the normal budgetary process.

I also propose that Parliament establish and nominate appropriate members to a board of directors of the authority to provide the governance, policy and strategic direction and to act as the employer of appropriate staff to ensure the authority meets its charter. The authority should be charged with

undertaking all those functions and be accountable to Parliament through the Premier for performance. Registered providers of awareness and training programs, young people at risk, identification and risk-reduction and early intervention programs should be funded by the authority to deliver accredited programs in accordance with the authority's delivery plans.

The authority would validate and evaluate the performance and utilisation of provided funds. The authority would be subject to the normal rigours faced by a statutory authority, including the Auditor-General, the Financial Management Act, the Public Sector Management and Employment Act and scrutiny by the Ombudsman.

In conclusion, I again express my gratitude for the opportunity to address Parliament on this critical issue. The views and strategies expressed by me today are not recent inventions but are based on my 20 years of direct involvement in dealing with young people who are at risk of serious damage. I have discussed my views and strategies widely with a broad cross-section of the community. I believe there is a very strong body of community support for a new way forward in the fight against drugs.

I know that these proposals will have made some people feel uncomfortable. However, political and personal agendas must be put aside in the best interests of our community, especially for our younger generation, whose future we hold in our hands.

We face one of the biggest and most important challenges of recent times. We must get this right. If we fail to seize upon this unique opportunity to move forward with a fresh approach to the destructive drug problem I believe we will be rightly criticised by future generations for that failure.

If we do take full advantage of this opportunity, while there can be no absolute guarantees of success, we will be able to say that we placed the best interests of our current and future younger generations ahead of any other consideration. I would encourage Parliament to view these proposals as a long-term investment in the wellbeing of young Victorians.

Thank you, Mr Speaker and Mr President, for allowing me to address Parliament on this critical issue. I commend these proposals to Parliament.

Honourable members applauded.

The SPEAKER — I now invite Dr Rob Moodie, the chief executive officer of Vichealth, to address the Parliament.

Dr MOODIE — Mr Speaker, Mr President, Premier, Leader of the Opposition and members of Parliament: as our concern about the deaths and injuries resulting from illicit drugs increases, we do need to remember the lessons we have learnt from some of the major public health successes we have been involved in.

In the early 1950s, 75 per cent of Victorian men smoked cigarettes. That figure is now down to somewhere about 22 per cent. As Mr Comrie said, in 1971 more than 1000 people died on our roads from road trauma; now 600 fewer people die each year, and there are 6000 fewer serious injuries.

How did we do it? We did it by agreeing on a long-term strategy that aligned our collective skills and capacities from a range of different sections and sectors throughout our community. It worked because we put a number of things together. We put together legislative and policy reform; we put together excellent research and surveillance; we mobilised communities; we put it together with front-line service provision and widespread community education.

What should we be doing now with illicit drug use? As explained in the Drug Policy Expert Committee's report, one very effective way of looking at this and trying to understand it is to examine the protective factors and the risk factors that determine whether or not we will be using drugs or whether we will use them harmfully.

Let us look first at the protective factors. They include a culture of cooperation and tolerance in our community, a sense of belonging to family, to school, to your community and your workplace. Good relations within one's family and outside the family are positive achievements for stability and security. On the other hand, risk factors include the availability of drugs; poverty; low attachment to family, to one's community, and to one's school or workplace; poor parenting; family conflict; parental alcohol and drug use; marital instability, and friends engaging in problem behaviours.

Our challenge is to work together to enhance the protective factors and to diminish the risk factors. I guess one of the bright lights when you look at it in this particular scenario is that many of those same protective and risk factors also determine a whole range of other harmful behaviours and health problems in our community such as depression, suicide, road trauma,

alcohol abuse, tobacco addiction, early drop-out from school, crime, homelessness and so on.

Any investment in the prevention of drug use by increasing protective factors also has major benefits in a number of other areas and vice versa. This joint sitting is as much about preventing a whole range of other problem behaviours as it is about the prevention of drug use.

What should we now continue? What should we expand? What should we begin now? Who should be involved? I guess the question is, 'Can any part of the Victorian community afford not to be involved?'. Let us start with schools: primary schools, secondary schools, institutes of technical and further education and universities. They must ensure students are in physically safe and tolerant environments, ones that support students' connectedness, support them staying at school and strengthen the student-teacher relationships.

We now have better and better evidence about how good school programs can work in this regard so that in the long run there is much less need for children and young adults to use drugs inappropriately.

The maternal child health and welfare services support parents of children and young people to prevent problematic drug use. They have a huge role in promoting effective parenting, communication with children and recognising behaviour problems.

Similarly, we must assist our sports, recreation and arts organisations to increase their capacity to allow people to participate, to belong and to have valued social roles. We have to expand the opportunities that business and industry provide for young people to participate in the economy.

Youth, faith and service organisations must provide services to those at risk and provide opportunities for people to contribute and to belong. They also have to be supported by communication strategies as we have done before to actively discourage illicit drug use by informing young people currently not using drugs of the risks and effects. Similarly, we need communication strategies for the families of drug users, residents and traders in high drug use areas, specialists in generalist work and peer education programs to assist users of illicit drugs to reduce overdoses and avoid HIV and hepatitis, and to help them to access social and treatment services.

There was one point where there was an enormous synergy between prevention and treatment. We have to remember what we have learnt about tobacco use and

what we might draw from the experience in Holland, Switzerland and Sweden — that is, that the more people we have who quit and the more people we have under treatment the more effective are our overall prevention efforts.

There are no short-term magic cures available. As Mr Comrie said, we must commit ourselves to the long haul. Successful dope use prevention requires a comprehensive 10 to 30-year investment, which includes all of us, not one that focuses only on our young people. To do this, we must have the right structures to ensure a connected response. We need to consider again what we have learnt from tobacco and road safety, and also from our experience from Vichealth.

We need an independent authority that focuses on prevention, one that provides a forum for real differences to be resolved, and for collective multipartisan strategies to be developed and adhered to. It has to be a structure that has teeth and authority, one that reports to the Premier and Parliament on behalf of the people of Victoria.

The Victoria of the future where drug problems are considerably reduced is an emotionally healthy creative tolerant and economically productive Victoria, but we must give much more to develop this Victoria of the future. Not only must we invest in dollar terms but also as importantly our collective goodwill, our intellect, our capacity to organise and to come together because together we do better.

Honourable members applauded.

The SPEAKER — I now invite David Brunt from the Salvation Army to address the Parliament.

Major BRUNT — Mr Speaker, Mr President, Premier, Leader of the Opposition and members of Parliament, permit me to say at the outset that I am not an academic but rather a person who has worked in this field now for 30 years, in Brisbane, Kings Cross and, for the past five years, in Melbourne. While working as the head of the Salvation Army's drug and alcohol services I still see addicted people on a daily basis.

I recently conducted the funeral of a young man of 22 years of age. He was contacted on the streets of St Kilda by our outreach worker and found his way to our counselling service. He was admitted to a residential rehabilitation program and for the next three months life was rosy. His parents were rejoicing, his health improved and everything seemed forthright and good.

Within a week of leaving the program after receiving all the accolades of his peers this young man was dead. The reason? The drug education services and everything else that we could offer somehow had failed. Because he started his heroin use again at the same level he left several months before, his body would not tolerate it. This young man's death made me rethink everything that we were doing in our services.

There are a number of aspects of the drug problem that we need to look at clearly. Often the opportunity to explore a person's needs and know that help is available is the extent of intervention that is required. Across Victoria many people are able to provide referral options and advice to the numerous community members in their location who choose to seek assistance through telephone or personal contact, such as Lifeline or Direct Line. Only yesterday I was privileged to be here to attend the launch of the family drug help line, which I believe will be a valuable asset to families in crisis.

We also need to offer programs that disseminate information and provide community education to minimise the harm to individuals who continue to follow a lifestyle which puts them at risk. These programs may include HIV/AIDS information, needle exchange programs, sexuality groups, nutritional information and so forth. They need to ensure that more healthy lifestyle choices are available to young people, together with viable future options for anyone who chooses to access them, and that the harm experienced by these individuals is minimised. These programs must operate in a non-judgmental atmosphere which supports young people's rights to make individual choices based on the fullest and most accurate information available. We do not see total abstinence and harm minimisation as opposing forces, but rather a continuum that allows choices to be made. The harm minimisation approach should inform all aspects of treatment.

There is a need for community-based programs that will offer both group and individual approaches to skills development. These programs may cover relapse prevention techniques, social skills, lifestyle changes and support, and recreational options. They can operate from shopfronts and church and community centres right across the state. The drive of local councils to respond with their own drug action plan needs to be commended and supported.

Home withdrawal programs and non-residential counselling programs are increasingly becoming part of community-based programs. The Salvation Army experience embraces these programs alongside

residential programs. The trial of the mobile overdose response service is one innovative approach just beginning in many regions of Victoria.

There is a need for longer term programs that will continue to exist for some people. Residential services must be there to provide those with complex needs some time-out facilities with good staff and role models who can effectively demonstrate interactions, new skills and lifestyle options which are being learnt. This intensive approach, whether offered in a therapeutic community or a residential rehabilitation program, is one which provides models. It is the modelling behaviour that many young people lack which I see today.

Residential rehabilitation programs need to be offered to people who have undergone drug withdrawal programs or other alcohol and drug treatment programs and have not been successful in reducing or overcoming their drug use problems. But that is not enough. There has to be a continuity of care. The residential portion of the program must be followed by this continuation of care within the community and the living environment of the participant, with daily interchanges with others significant to them lending the motivational material to continue with the difficulty of mastering new skills. These programs require highly skilled staff to act as negotiators in advocacy situations and to facilitate growth across the wide range of skill areas involved as young people and others may have additional disabilities and exhibit quite challenging behaviour.

Many studies have been made about matching clients with their needs. I refer to one entitled 'Project Match' in drug treatment. Obviously it is important that any service matches the person and their needs. Many treatment facilities offer a limited range of services appropriate for a limited number of clients. In reality, at the time there may be only a few choices available to the person. Nonetheless, the referral process needs to be handled carefully as many people see it as simply buck-passing.

The young people who I see with substance abuse problems have associated lifestyle problems. They frequently need the help of a number of different services over a period of time. For instance, a person who has serious alcohol and other drug problems and who is sick, homeless and unemployed will often start treatment in a detoxification centre and may then move into a therapeutic community. Movement back into the general community will happen, but it will require financial aid; help in obtaining accommodation; skills in communication, assertiveness and sometimes

parenting; alternative leisure skills; help with establishing a new social network; vocational training; ongoing medical care; and, I believe, spiritual support and direction. A variety of services are available at each of those stages. People will benefit from the support of each one.

Let me conclude by saying that I believe that addiction is best described as a chronic relapsing condition. Many of the people we will see need a number of entry points in detoxification and rehabilitation facilities. That does not mean that programs have failed but rather that the service must be maintained and that easier access for re-entry must be provided.

Honourable members applauded.

The SPEAKER — I now invite His Grace Archbishop George Pell from the Catholic archdiocese of Melbourne to address the joint sitting.

Archbishop PELL — Mr Speaker, Mr President, Premier, Leader of the Opposition and members of Parliament: heroin deaths are only the tip of an iceberg of misery and depression, much but not all of which is caused by other drugs such as alcohol and marijuana. The Australian youth suicide rate, one the highest in the world, is a related but overlapping problem.

This joint sitting of the Victorian houses of Parliament, which it is my privilege to address, is a worthy attempt to spell out a long-term coordinated strategy to reduce demand, especially among young people, by creating significant areas of agreement and consensus among Parliament and the people, leaving to one side contentious issues especially over forms of treatment.

Mr Neil Comrie is to be congratulated on this initiative, and all the major political parties and especially the government are to be commended too for their ready cooperation. I recognise and applaud the willingness of Premier Bracks and the Minister for Health to embrace and develop this initiative. I wish to acknowledge again my gratitude to them for their strong and effective commitment to grapple with this massive problem. For the main game, they are heading in the right direction.

This is not just a problem for the government and the police. Community money as well as government money will be needed. Nor can it be dealt with effectively by handing over the whole load to the schools and the churches; the problem is too big. All community organisations, especially the media and the leaders among our young people at school and work and at university, will need to combine effectively if we are to change youth attitudes to drug usage, just as we

have made drinking and driving unacceptable and as we have improved road safety.

Traditional leaders such as parents, schools and churches have lost authority among the young over the past 40 or 50 years. Magazines, newspapers, television, videos and the Internet are formidable agents of influence that too often imply that greed is good, self-indulgence is natural and high risk-taking is to be glorified. While this escapism and entertainment will not be eliminated and probably not much reduced, it can be partially balanced by explicit advertising. A Victoria-wide consensus would be an invaluable contribution towards a fully resourced national media campaign reinforced by community initiatives to change the culture in Australia towards illicit drugs by cutting down demand.

I will say a word on schools. We often expect too much from schools as the most readily available agencies to combat social ills. But all schools could and should make a contribution to reducing the demand for drugs. Such programs need to be prepared carefully, because some incautious instruction has simply heightened student curiosity.

Knowledge by itself rarely changes behaviour. A spiritual framework in the broadest terms, a vision, a system of meaning, perhaps around the golden rule of treating others as we wish to be treated ourselves, is needed as the context for information and argumentation appropriate to the youngster's level of development. This is easily fitted at a variety of levels into the ongoing health education units and units of moral education and religious education where they exist.

The causes of experimentation and the persistent usage of illicit drugs are complex and care must be taken not to oversimplify so that educators can avoid being seen as simply old fashioned or irrelevant. The building blocks for such a comprehensive education program are already in place to be developed and refined.

Last year the Catholic Church in Melbourne opened the Mary of the Cross Centre to help combat the drug problem. A primary focus is to help the families of users. If family breakdown worsens, it will cancel out the gains of even the best social programs.

This joint sitting is a sign of hope to young people generally and for drug users. It is a particular expression of a widespread popular ambition to curtail the suffering, to improve the situation of the young and the vulnerable. None of us, as we have heard, has a magic wand. There will be no sudden and spectacular

breakthrough. It will be a long haul, but it is always worthwhile to broaden community understanding and to deepen the involvement of more and more people.

I am confident that there are large areas of agreement, that we can build on these, and devise a long-term coordinated strategy to curtail and then reduce demand for drugs.

Honourable members applauded.

The SPEAKER — I now invite Professor Margaret Hamilton, the director of Turning Point, to address the joint sitting.

Professor HAMILTON — Mr Speaker, Mr President, Premier, Leader of the Opposition, members of Parliament and colleagues: one always needs to ask the source of the title 'expert' when a group such as this is introduced to you as experts. For that reason I always try to make a point of explaining my background. I spent 31 years working full time in drugs as a clinician, researcher, teacher, policy thinker and adviser and, from time to time, user of a range of substances — mostly legal, I should add. But I have also spent 20 years as a parent, and that would be the other claim I would put to you for my expertise.

The title 'prevention' could include almost everything we ever do in response to drugs. I do not always find it helpful to say that prevention can be divided into primary, secondary and tertiary, thereby incorporating everything. I think the purpose of today is to try to retain some focus on prevention.

The usual expectation is demand reduction, or what we call primary prevention — that is, preventing the use of illicit drugs in this case or preventing the uptake of those drugs by young people and by adults. This is an attractive and appealing arena; it tugs at the heart strings; it sings to all of our tunes; it is something we can all agree on and over which there is little conflict. I would urge you of the need to look beyond this for obvious reasons.

There remains limited evidence of our sometimes tired approaches to primary prevention. Drug education in schools on its own needs to be very carefully looked at. It is only when it is fully integrated with a whole-of-school approach and linked closely with other community initiatives that it can be found to be in any way protective or preventive in relation to young people's uptake of drugs.

Media campaigns on their own have very limited value in my now extensive experience and, if these are not

paralleled with a platform of other activities, are a great waste of community resources.

We must also remember that many structural changes have been going on in our community over the past 30 years, which include great disparity between wealth and poverty. That was certainly not the case when I was born, or if it was, I was unaware of it. People are now aware of it. We must look to see how in this environment we can enhance community competence and cooperation, not contribute to communities feeling incompetent, unable to respond to things and unable to work together.

I want to mention secondary prevention, because many people believe one hit a junkie makes. Most people who try illicit drugs do not proceed to continued, regular and repeated use of those drugs. Our response to that first, second, third or maybe tenth attempt is important. It is not just a case of early intervention — parents need information about how to constructively respond in a way that will not produce an effect that is likely to lead to ongoing use.

Early responses need to be sheeted home in places where people first present for help. The generic health and welfare services, together with education in our community, is where people with early trouble go and early trouble appears, usually not asking for drug help but in trouble nevertheless. If we continue to look to specialist drug treatment services, which can at best respond only to long-term dependent users, we miss those opportunities for early responses.

So, where should we start? My first claim would be that we have to prevent the community from becoming lost, disempowered, disappointed and disillusioned. We have to stop people feeling left behind. Those of us who are so-called experts have to be much better at taking the community with us, sharing our information, encouraging dialogue, doing our research and ensuring that the community understands it and participates in debate. We must engage in long-term strategic planning that is proactive not reactive to the crisis that appears on the front of the newspaper every morning.

We have to prevent division. We need a cooperative, collaborative, respectful approach to one another's ideas. We must listen to them. We must not compete and just condemn them. We must also be willing to seek evidence, to support specific ideas and not merely go with something because someone has had a good idea. We have to be willing to test and trial new initiatives and to assess and evaluate the responses, including initiatives that hold promise from other places.

We have to stop inefficient spending in our responses. There is not much point constantly saying that we have to increase or improve something if we do not have the work force to ensure that this can be done effectively. When we leave behind education and training, research and information gathering, we do the future generation of services no good.

We have to be willing to tap the community's concern as energy, for these people wish to engage in doing something, anything about drugs, and help to constructively form partnerships to ensure that they are functional responses and not divisive and dysfunctional.

I want to say four more things about prevention. Firstly, when we look at prevention in relation to special groups, I believe the crude gateway theory has been clearly debunked. However, we must recognise the very strong associations between smoking cigarettes and the subsequent uptake of illicit drugs. In the Australian study done last year by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, or NDARC, and the Centre for Adolescent Health in Melbourne, the researchers concluded that cigarette smoking was an important predictor of both initiation and persistence of cannabis use. Further, research by Associate Professor David Hill at the Centre for the Study of Cancer-Related Behaviours showed strong associations between the smoking of cigarettes among parents and the increased likelihood of the children of those smoking parents using cannabis.

Although historically we might have thought there is a big leap between smoking cannabis and injecting heroin, it is not true today. What we now see is the practice of smoking or sometimes the chasing of heroin, so that the transition from that route of administration — that is, smoking — to the smoking of another substance is a small move for a young person to make. They are already smoking cigarettes; cannabis and then smoking of heroin is not so different.

We have found from research done in Sydney that people who persist with the smoking of heroin will move in transition to injecting heroin within 6 to 10 weeks. It should be clear that when we talk about the drug heroin we should also talk about tobacco and alcohol.

Secondly, treatment is a part of prevention. Treatment works. No Australian research compares the dollar return on our investment for, say, certain forms of interdiction or law enforcement with treatment or drug education. The only research of this kind is available in the USA, and it suggests that of all of the expenditures that were studied, which did not include drug

education — that is, treatment, interdiction and policing — treatment gave the best dollar return for that investment.

Why is treatment an important part of prevention? I will not repeat what Dr Moodie has already said, but if you take out the current dependent troubled users you take out the major opposition to your prevention messages. This has been found in a number of European countries.

Further, treatment ensures continuity between primary prevention and working to prevent the next generation of drug users expanding. The children of current drug users are the next generation of drug users if we do not intervene, and their children will be the subsequent generation. Services such as child protection report that 45 per cent of the clients in their care had primary substance abuse problems and a further 13 per cent had secondary problems with substance abuse. What do we do about substance abuse in those systems of care? The situation is similar in mental health, homeless services and juvenile and adult justice systems where the proportion is much higher.

If we offer treatment we know it can work. Treatments have been found to work overseas. A substantial study in Britain — the National Treatment Outcome Research Study, which is ongoing and which we are now copying or repeating in Australia but it is too early to call — found that: statistics on continued illegal drug use after treatment were favourable; there was a clear improvement in the use of heroin, cocaine and other drugs; abstinence rates for illicit opiate use more than doubled; major gains in reduced health risk behaviour such as the sharing of injecting equipment was seen; high rates of criminal behaviour were found prior to treatment among this group; and after treatment there was a marked reduction in the activity of criminals. They estimate that the savings to society in the United Kingdom with a reduced level of criminal behaviour and demand upon the criminal justice system alone was worth more than £5 million a year. I suggest that we should therefore see treatment as an important and fundamental component of prevention.

I have two more quick messages. There are many preventive interventions that we can engage in with drug users. Major Brunt has already alluded to some of them, and I will not repeat them. They are well known, and they are very important. It is not all or nothing with a drug user. There is a hierarchy of harms and a hierarchy of costs. There are many things we can do, even with someone who persists in using, that will reduce the harm and prevent further trouble and cost to the community.

The last thing we need to prevent is imports taking over our local market, and in that regard I refer to the need to retain an Australian approach to drugs. In my treatment service, which also engages in research and policy development, I talk about the need among our clinicians and researchers for patience and persistence in this field. One treatment does not a cure make! Perhaps the message of patience and persistence also applies to policy and program development. I hope we can take two significant characteristics that I regard as fundamental to our history and our character, and then build on those in Australia. They are a humane concern for our fellow citizens, including drug users, and a pragmatic capacity to get together and solve problems.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you all today.

Honourable members applauded.

The SPEAKER — I now invite Mr Andy Hamilton, the principal of Heatherhill Secondary College, to address us.

Mr HAMILTON — Mr Speaker, Mr President, Premier, Leader of the Opposition and members of Parliament: schools can do much to prepare students to face the world of drugs and develop the skills they need to reject them. Many schools like mine have implemented a number of their own programs and have also been involved in government-funded pilot programs, all of which were extensively evaluated and judged to be extremely successful. Nevertheless, funding for all of them has been discontinued. It is this stop-start approach that prevents progress being made.

Let me briefly outline some of these programs. First, the Open Your Mind program was the focus of the Community Relations and Education project initiated by the education department in 1995 to address racism and related issues. A former student recently wrote to me saying:

Do you realise that the Open Your Mind program in 1995 really allowed me to become the person that I am today? Honestly, it was such a great way to get involved in the school community.

This project was terminated in early 1996 when funds were diverted to youth suicide prevention.

Second, the Turning the Tide anti-drug strategy funded the Connect project from 1997 to 1999. One of the highlights of this project was the involvement of students from four local secondary colleges with director Bryan Derrick in the Theatre of the Oppressed, a strand of theatre aimed at influencing and promoting better relationships between students, teachers, families, peers and the wider community.

The performances, each of which was followed by extensive discussion with the audience, were held in schools and other community settings. Issues and experiences presented ranged from teenage pregnancy, drug use, family conflict and racism through to bullying and exploitation of junior employees. ‘Brilliant! Should be adopted by all schools as a method of promoting resilience and student participation’ was one comment made after a performance in October 1999. As with its predecessor, funding ceased soon after.

Third, our school participated as one of 100 pilot schools in the Health Promoting Schools project, a partnership between the Department of Education, Vichealth and Deakin University. Visitors to Heatherhill Secondary College from Asia-Pacific countries for Vichealth’s Summer School for Health promotion over the past two years were very impressed with us as an example of a health-promoting school. This project no longer exists.

Finally, Heatherhill was one of 20 pilot schools in the Student Action Teams project, a joint initiative by the departments of justice and education to work with the Safer Cities and Shires program and to encourage student leadership. Our students were most positive about their participation in this project, and their efforts were recognised when they won the education category of the Fire Awareness Community Service Awards in October 2000.

Many teachers believed that Student Action Teams was a better concept than the traditional student representative councils in schools. Funding, however, for the Student Action Teams initiatives stopped after two years.

Teachers and organisations involved in these exciting initiatives spend many hours in planning, preparing and developing resources and ideas. They then implement the programs, only to have them removed within a short space of time. It makes you wonder why they bother.

Each of the four programs described was evaluated by consultants, and on each occasion it was acknowledged that the program had benefited the students and that they were most positive about their participation in them. Such programs helped develop the protective factors against drug abuse. The strength of them all was the fact that they took a holistic approach to the health and wellbeing of each individual student. The problem appears to be that the positives from such programs are not continued and that other schools have not had the opportunity to benefit from them.

I believe I have clearly demonstrated the ad hoc approach that has been taken in relation to the issues of health promotion and drug prevention over the past five or six years. This approach must cease. We need long-term creative and supportive approaches in the future.

I would urge that the following action be taken by this joint session of Parliament:

- (1) Agreement and commitment to a long-term bipartisan vision for the health and wellbeing of young people as part of the drug prevention strategy.

The current government has developed long-term goals for literacy, numeracy and retention rates, so why not health and wellbeing?

- (2) A commitment to implementing best practice health programs for all schools.
- (3) Long-term funding for successful programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on the critical issue of drug prevention. Our young people really do matter. We all have a responsibility to make a difference. Thank you.

Honourable members applauded.

The SPEAKER — I now invite Mr Peter Wearne, a youth worker from the Youth Substance Abuse Service, to address us.

Mr WEARNE — I have to get this sort of right — Mr Speaker, Mr President, Premier and Leader of the Opposition: when I look out today I see a lot of familiar faces, both within the gallery and among members of both houses. There have been people who have shared the experience of being on the streets of St Kilda with me late at night — and Louise is having a smile there — talking to young men and women who are prostituting themselves.

The issue that I want to speak about today is really about, firstly, establishing the difference between prevention for young people who will experiment with drugs and young people who will develop problematic use.

Clearly society has changed in the last 20 years. I stand before you — I will reveal my age to you now: I am 43. I got this way naturally; no chemical assistance was required whatsoever, which will probably shock some

of you. I am only a long-suffering St Kilda supporter; this is what it has done to me.

I think about my own life and the enormous privilege that I have had being raised in Victoria, being loved by two parents, being supported by family and being able to gain significant opportunity for employment. Really, I have got nothing I could want for in my life. With many of the young people I work with, that is completely the opposite.

Over the past two days we have had a young man in our residential unit at Youth Substance Abuse Service, known as YSAS, at Gertrude Street regressing through the trauma of sexual abuse. I can only describe what was seen by many of our staff as he relived that abuse in a corner of a room and acted out the effects on him of that abuse which occurred when he was under five years of age — and being shown cigarette burns by a person of 20 years of age that occurred to them when they were under a year old, and having explained to you by over 70 per cent of the young women who come through our service how significant adults in their life used them sexually and abused them physically.

When we talk about prevention for young people who have significant dependency on drugs we are not talking about a drug problem but about a lifestyle and a life problem that has not been addressed by this community.

Many of our jails, many of our homes and many of our welfare organisations are populated by young people who can tell you horror stories. There would not be a person in this room who would not have heard a story like that. You are representatives of this community — you know how the community aches; you know how the community hurts.

So where have we arrived at? We have arrived at a system that is punishing and invalidating many young people who live amongst us. I thought Margaret's words were particularly pertinent. We have to work together as a community to find ways of identifying early these people who are at risk. This is not brain surgery, this is not rocket science — we know who they are. We understand that many of our young people are suffering from mental illnesses, we understand that many of our young people are suffering from depression and we understand that many of our young people are suffering from traumatic events in their lives.

The role of trauma as a significant correlate and causation factor in drug misuse and abuse is well documented. In many cases the young people we withdraw off drugs only re-experience their trauma

once the effect of the drugs they have been taking has gone. The drugs are an adaptive device for them, a self-medicating device.

We have to provide more and more options for these young people. We have to provide housing; we have to provide significant support; we have to provide employment — creative ways of engaging these young people so they feel a part of this community and not separate from this community.

I must say to the members of the media who are here today: you have a significant role in shaping this debate and community attitude. We need to have stories that do not vilify these people but explain why they have become the way they are. These things do not happen by accident; they happen through well-documented events in their lives.

Our former executive officer at YSAS was fond of saying, 'When young people walk through our door, they walk through in two ways: either they walk through with 17 workers attached to them or they walk through with no-one attached to them'.

The issue of consistency in service provision to young people is significant. You can go to case planning meetings and have 20 professionals sitting around a table and ask the question, 'Where is the consistency in response here?'. We need to streamline our responses; we need to act on the social issues that are the causation of these factors in these young people's lives; and we need to support families because they are the principal building block in giving hope to young people. Young people are raised in families but supported by the community, so the community needs to take a hand. We need to provide opportunities. Young people should be going through our education system with a sense of hope and optimism in terms of where they come out the other end.

Youth unemployment in a society like ours is totally unacceptable. There is no reason on God's earth why young people leaving our schools should face unemployment. We need to create wealth, and to create wealth we need to create opportunities for young people to participate in the many institutions and social structures that this society values.

Because you have heard a lot today — and I commend you for sitting through it — I would like to finish on this note. This is a problem that has a solution. Prevention is not about worrying about drugs; it is about creating the social environment within which young people can flourish. It is about enabling families to do for their children what we are doing for our

children. It is about making sure that we do not have a society that favours a few and lets the rest look after themselves. Our social justice principles and our principles of humanity absolutely demand of all of us that we pay attention to this.

I am personally grateful to Neil Comrie for putting my name forward. I will tell you a story. I met Neil over 20 years ago when he was working in an anti-paedophile, anti-sexual abuse squad that worked in the inner south and around Melbourne. I remember standing across the grave from Neil at funerals of 15-year-old children who had died from drug overdoses. I remember seeing the tears in his and everybody else's eyes as we buried children that should never have died. These deaths are preventable if we as a society — and we as people who have compassion and hearts to reach out — are fair dinkum about doing something significant.

Young people will always experiment with drugs. Young people will always take risks. Let's minimise the harm that can come from that. However, in terms of problematic abuse and dependency, there are serious questions being asked of us. We need to support education systems. We need to support employers to employ. We need to support all the structures that are there as safety nets to allow these young people to participate. The last thing we need to do is to validate young people. We do not need to blame them; we need to validate them.

These are the questions I will leave you with. How do you mend a broken heart? How do you fix a trashed life? And how serious are we about making sure that this problem is seen to now and not put off to the future?

Honourable members applauded.

The SPEAKER — I now invite questions from honourable members to our expert panel.

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to Mr Neil Comrie. I welcome your contribution, including your outline of a model for an independent authority reporting to the Parliament that targets education and early intervention and diversion initiatives. Do you have any thoughts on when this model or authority could be set up?

Mr COMRIE — My only response to that would be: as soon as is really possible, but not before appropriate planning and discussion takes place as to how that model might work most effectively. There obviously needs to be time to consider the structure, accountability, mechanisms, performance indicators

and those sorts of things. I really would not like to see us rush in and put in place another ad hoc arrangement. This is too important and it must work. I would like it to come in perhaps after a few months of reflecting on how we do it best.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — Dr Moodie, are there different levels of prevention that you can expand upon that, for instance, would assist in preventing some people getting themselves into trouble in the future?

Dr MOODIE — I think it was alluded to by our last speaker — that a lot of the issues we are talking about in drug use are the same preventive and risk factors that determine a whole lot of other health problems and other problem behaviours. That is why there is a sense that we are not talking about just drug use; we are talking about a whole range of problem behaviours for young people and for us as adults as well. The more we start to address those bigger, more upstream issues which relate to how people connect in their community, in schools, families and workplaces and how they were brought up — as Peter was talking about — in supporting families that do fit in with and complement specific education and drug use, the better. If we are doing only the bit at the end about drug education, that is simply not enough.

We are not dealing with the upstream causes of harmful drug use, suicide, depression, tobacco addiction, early drop-out from school, crime, homelessness, and a whole range of other issues. That is why we can expand all the effort being put on drug use to looking at a whole range of social problems we need to deal with.

Mr RYAN (Leader of the National Party) — My question is to Mr Comrie. Although in a sense understandably the focus of today's discussion has been of a metropolitan nature, from a police perspective and based on your former role can I ask you to give the house information on the extent of the drug issues in country Victoria and how you feel they might best be approached?

Mr COMRIE — Sadly, I think it is fair to say that drug abuse is not confined to the metropolitan area and now in all of our regional centres in Victoria there is very strong evidence of drug abuse, sometimes at the level of that occurring in suburban Melbourne. I believe — and I think it was Dr Penington who made the point today — that to a large extent these problems have to be identified and addressed at the local level. But they must be supported by an overarching strategy which has a number of key components, one of which is the ability to provide the services where they are required. There is little point in providing a lot of

assessment and treatment services in Melbourne if the people requiring them live in other parts of the state.

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA (Melbourne West) — Major Brunt, prior to being involved in politics, for many years I worked as a nurse in Victoria's health system, including on programs for substance abuse. I am interested in hearing your views on how the treatment system is coping with the drug problem and also what suggestions you have in the next steps for drug treatment.

Major BRUNT — There is no doubt that waiting lists are a nightmare for everyone. We need facilities that can respond immediately a person requires help, particularly the need for detoxification or rehabilitation facilities. Having said that, in the past few months the government has brought online additional rehabilitation and detoxification beds. Alongside that we need trials of other pharmaceuticals to see whether they alleviate the situation. Having brought on extra beds and having introduced a number of trials of different chemicals, in 6 to 12 months we may be in a position to monitor those trials and give an answer on their success. However, at this time we are in an awkward situation. We have just opened a 16-bed detoxification unit. In the first three weeks we had more than 100 referrals, so that is the level at which we are working.

The SPEAKER — With the indulgence of the house, Professor Hamilton wishes to add to that answer.

Professor HAMILTON — It is true that the treatment opportunities have been greatly enhanced recently. As Major Brunt said, it is a little too early to say whether that is sufficient, appropriate or the right spread. I have been examining the heroin drought, which we are researching to see what is happening. Last year between 1 January and 20 March 211 calls were taken by Direct Line, a statewide contact point for people in relation to an initial request to get on to the methadone program. During the equivalent time this year we have received 354 requests. We have certainly not yet satiated the demand for treatment, and until we do some of the expenditure in other areas will need to continue — in jails, in child protection in mental health institutions and so on. It is very difficult to have enough, but it is an issue that the house needs to be aware of.

Hon. M. A. BIRRELL (East Yarra) — My question is to Mr Comrie. This bipartisan forum and debate ends at about 10.00 p.m. today. We have heard your constructive suggestion for an independent body that reports to Parliament. We all want to make sure that there are some practical results. If you put yourself

ahead three or four months and look back, what practical extra programs would you like to see begun during that three, four or five-month period so that we can get a sense of what action you would like taken?

Mr COMRIE — I do not know I can say with any great authority or expectation that I want to see any programs commenced — that is part of the problem. To a large extent the way the issue has been dealt with is through projectitis — that is, every time we get an issue we put another project in place.

What I am asking for and seeking support for today is a commitment to a bipartisan, long-term strategy for about 10 years, which I believe is the minimum period. To undertake that, the first thing that needs to be done is to come to an agreement on a structure that effectively puts in place the necessary measures to go down that path. I would consider it a remarkable achievement if such a structure were put in place in the next three months.

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — My question is to Professor Hamilton. I note your background in early intervention programs. A number of organisations in Geelong have regularly emphasised to me the role of harm minimisation in dealing with the issue. I am interested in hearing your views on harm minimisation as a strategy.

Professor HAMILTON — I am a strong advocate and supporter of Australian-style harm minimisation. There has been a lot of unnecessary disagreement and debate in this country because some people have a misunderstanding of what that means.

Harm minimisation continues to be the fundamental principle that underlies the national drug policy framework to which the Prime Minister and the ministers for health, justice and education federally and in the states and territories have all signed up. It is the fundamental policy principle that we all work toward.

The definition in Australia of harm minimisation can include no drugs or in the treatment world, abstinence from drugs. It is not, as it is sometimes thought of in the United States of America, the equivalent of legalising all drugs. The first thing that is needed in our dialogue is to clarify terms.

The community should humanely do all that it can to reduce the harm not just to individual drug users and their families who feel ashamed, guilty, troubled and in severe strife, but also to the community. We should also try to reduce the harm to those of us who want to use public space or want to feel safe when we go to an event. We should reduce the harm to businesses and

professional organisations who have to operate in a street environment that sometimes includes drug users who are trading.

Harm minimisation provides a constructive framework. How it is implemented and understood at the local level is something that bears great analysis and much dialogue. In my experience I find harm analysis and looking to see whether an intervention is net harm reducing or harm enhancing enormously valuable in responding to knee-jerk reactions. Sometimes our knee-jerk responses seem okay, but when they are looked at from a harm minimisation perspective they can be harm enhancing.

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — My question is directed to Mr Comrie and I ask: what do you believe the appropriate indicators for the evaluation of your proposed independent statutory authority should be and what agency or mechanism would you believe should be responsible for collecting, analysing and evaluating that data? In the most simple words: how do we judge its success or failure and who should do that?

Mr COMRIE — There are many mechanical aspects about the proposal that need to be worked through. I have put forward a broad structure that should be constituted through an independent authority reporting through the Premier to Parliament. The normal process of accountability for public funding with the Auditor-General and various other pieces of legislation will need to be complied with.

At the end of the day Parliament itself will need to be satisfied through some reporting mechanism, whether it be an annual report or progressive reports, as to the efficacy of the solution I am putting forward. Those details can be developed once agreement is reached to go down the path of such an authority. Any authority must be held highly accountable for the expenditure of public funds. There is great attraction in such an independent authority drawing on some of the private funds that are currently committed to a whole range of different programs, the real value of which must somehow be questioned. If we can join public and private funds in this approach, the resources available to tackle the problem we are talking about today can be greatly enhanced.

Mr HOLDING (Springvale) — My question is to Andy Hamilton. One of the themes that has permeated all the presentations today is the importance the family can play in protecting children who are at risk, as well as the pervasive influence of family breakdown.

In the Springvale area the families that come from non-English-speaking backgrounds face a particular challenge because of the clash of cultures between what happens where they have come from and their experience in Australia. Will you comment on the experience of Heatherhill Secondary College, and other schools if you can, in the use of peer support as a mechanism for overcoming those areas where families are perhaps not providing the level of support they should?

Mr HAMILTON — Mr Holding is quite correct in relation to the question of family support. It is a serious problem. There are families which, if they have a concern about their child doing something wrong such as running away from home, will toss that child out of the home and create a problem. If there is any sort of serious misbehaviour the family often wants to wipe the child off the family book, so to speak. There is a great need for family support. It is a problem across all ethnic groups in Springvale. Getting family support on issues such as school councils is an issue. We have people from Anglo Saxon backgrounds on the councils and getting people from different cultures on them is a major problem. It is very serious.

There is a great willingness among young people to work together. In the couple of programs I mentioned there is a tremendous bonding between students from different backgrounds, and they work together to provide that support. We have had a number of crises over the years and students have got together. There is willingness to do that. That sort of program is really worth while.

We have been able to get cooperation between schools. Springvale is an area where the networks between young people are incredible. They all know each other and what everyone is doing, so it is a good way of getting things done. I hope that answers your question.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — My question is to Mr Comrie, and it deals with the issue of funding. I understand there is widespread support for the use of private funding in your proposed independent statutory authority, but in your contribution you suggested that there be hypothecation of existing funds from existing departments and long-term funding. Will you explore for members the funding models you have in mind to ensure that such an independent statutory authority is properly resourced?

Mr COMRIE — As I said during my address, many good things are already occurring in addressing the drug problem. There are very many committed people and quite considerable sums of money have

already been committed to various programs across the state. The real difficulty for us is to be able to say with any authority whether these programs are having any effect, whether they are properly coordinated and whether they work together to have us all headed in one direction. I think the simple and basic answer to that is we cannot say that with any authority at all.

What I am saying is that as a starting point we should quarantine that funding, consider where it is being directed and ensure it is being directed to the areas of highest priority, where we are most likely to get the most significant return. We can then consider other options that might be available for funding. Here I am talking about the private sector. I have spoken to many people in the private sector and they are very keen to make a contribution to some meaningful, long-term strategy. There may also be a third option. Although it is not for me to say, I cannot think of a better source of funding than the Community Support Fund for something as significant as this.

If put together, all of those things could provide a strong base of funding for such an authority to operate for the foreseeable future until we could clarify exactly what we needed to commit down the track. Again, that needs to be done on a long-term basis rather than on a year-to-year ad hoc basis, which unfortunately is very much the situation at the present time.

Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) — My question is to Mr Peter Wearne. Given that so many people who have drug abuse problems are so obviously not in control of their own behaviour and lives, in your experience would compulsory detoxification and compulsory residential rehabilitation in a hopefully supportive environment be useful?

Mr WEARNE — I did not think I was going to get a question. Thank you for that, I am really pleased. When we use the term compulsory, we are going down a path that is not in sync with what some people have been through. A young woman went through our residential program about two weeks ago to withdraw from heroin. Through the withdrawal a whole lot of other issues in her life came up — memories, flashbacks and things like that. Her behaviour became so difficult that we had to ask her to leave. One of the myths about detoxification is that it is the end of the problem, but for many people it is just the beginning. All the things that have been dealt with by the drug flood back into the person's mind and life. We have to be careful about having compulsory treatment. Some people will disagree with me, but I think we have to have a range of options for people who want to deal with their drug issue.

We have talked about the harm reduction continuum of maintaining people as safely as possible while they are using right through to the abstinence program option. It is about providing many options. I am not a supporter of compulsory anything. I think we have to provide many interventions and many pathways out. The biggest issue is where does a young person go when they withdraw from a drug. Where do they go? They go straight back to the mess they were in. This is the challenge for the community. What is the six-month, 12-month, two-year, five-year strategy? David spoke about that quite eloquently when he talked about the young man who died. That is not an uncommon event. Young people withdraw, they go back, they use, and they die. Are they any better off than they were when they were on the drug? We have to have a continuum of care that incorporates life skills, family support, reuniting families when possible and other options.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Wimmera) — Following on from the Leader of the National Party I address my question to Dr Penington. Many young country people are moving to Melbourne or other large centres for education, work or life experiences, but there is not a lot of family or social support for these people. Are there any figures that identify that country youth is suffering from drug overdosing or death, and does he have a strategy to address these concerns?

Dr PENINGTON — Mr Delahunty, I agree with you that there are real problems for country youth. When young people come to the city they do not have the family support that is potentially available to metropolitan young people, and that places them at far greater risk.

There is no simple answer to that. Young people will move around; they have every right to move around. As has been said by others, we have to recognise that any attempt to change the behaviour of a person who has already started using drugs has to take into account the whole situation of that person, including their family. It has to take into account how to get them back into a reasonable social existence and to get them to see the possibility of getting employment and having a useful role in society. That is not an easy task that can be done by any simple quick fix; it has to involve all local communities in our state. That is why I have emphasised again and again that I think any body which is set up must work with local communities.

It is within the local communities where local industry is likely to be willing to make some contribution to strategies to get young people back on track and into employment. That is where we can mobilise an understanding of the issue and deal with it at the local

community level. It will not happen centrally, and I have reservations about having all the money put into a body that is in Melbourne. Services must be provided through government in many areas. They must include health services, community services, the education department and our schools, policing, justice and youth affairs. All these things continue to play a role. Those functions of government must continue.

My view is that we need to have a body that will review whether or not the programs are being successful, and that body should be accountable to Parliament and report to the Premier as required. We need to recognise that the whole set of programs across the whole range of government services is accountable in a way that is producing the outcomes we need. Those outcomes have to be in local communities right across the state.

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — I am keen to know the views of Archbishop Pell on the strengths of family and community as a means of helping young people turn from drug usage. All speakers today have commented on the value of strengthening families in our community to provide strong support so that our young people have a fall-back position as they move through life. Would you like to comment, Archbishop?

Archbishop PELL — My views on this topic may be contentious. I believe, for a start, we should maintain the legal protections for marriage to the extent that that is possible. I find it strange that marriage is one of the few contracts that you can break with impunity, and there is no bad consequence for you if you renounce your responsibilities not just to your partner but to your children. What can be done in the area of the law is limited, and it is a massive problem.

Years ago a President of the United States of America, Lyndon Johnson, introduced a program to bring the black community forward under a program that I loosely call the Great Society plan. Senator Moynihan of New York said he was frightened at the deteriorating situation of black families destroying what President Johnson was attempting to achieve. Now, 30 or 40 years later, the white communities in the United States are deteriorating at the same rate as the black communities had been deteriorating prior to the President's introduction of that program's measures.

I would like to list four or five steps that would immediately and truly help, but perhaps a first step is for everybody to realise how grave the situation is and to appreciate the long-term potential for damage unless we can control and change it in some way. I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful.

Mr SMITH (Glen Waverley) — My question is directed to Archbishop Pell. We have heard much today about early intervention and treatment phases to help people at risk. The rehabilitation phase, particularly live-in accommodation, is perhaps the most expensive phase. How do you think that important phase can be expanded and funded?

Archbishop PELL — There appear to be two stages of rehabilitation. One is the primary and initial detoxification. The Catholic agencies looked at whether we could be involved, but the recurrent costs seem to be clearly beyond our capacity. However, the second stage that has been mentioned involves trying to provide communities for people who have gone through detoxification — that is, halfway houses — to go back into the community. Many such Christian communities are working in that way in parts of Europe — for example, in Italy. We will be looking at that within the Catholic community to try to provide halfway houses.

As has been pointed out by Peter Wearne and David Brunt, the incidence of relapse is significant and often there is nowhere for people to go after they have completed detoxification. A real need exists in that regard. Community groups such as churches can play a role in that area.

The SPEAKER — The time set down for asking questions has expired. I call upon the Premier to move a vote of thanks to our guests.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have pleasure in congratulating the speakers. The session today has been stimulating and I believe we have all learnt something new by listening to the different speakers.

A longstanding and abiding interest of this Parliament is to ensure that it has the right ingredients, the right support and the right mechanisms to make a difference to Victoria's drug crisis. Acknowledging the problem is one thing, but to take steps to remedy it is another. What we have heard today has assisted and supported us enormously and will help in the debates that each of us have in our respective houses.

On behalf of the people of Victoria, the Victorian government and all honourable members, I thank Dr Penington, Mr Neil Comrie, Dr Rob Moodie, Major David Brunt, His Grace Archbishop George Pell, Professor Margaret Hamilton, Mr Andy Hamilton and Mr Peter Wearne. You have all acquitted yourselves extraordinarily well. You deservedly hold the title of experts in your own fields. It may not be directly in all

cases, but in the sum total of experience you have added significantly to the debate in Victoria.

I also congratulate the Speaker on his conduct of this afternoon's proceedings. I notice that he afforded His Grace Archbishop George Pell a greater parliamentary privilege than we have as parliamentarians: when his time expired he was allowed to continue speaking. I have noted his preference in that matter for the future!

On behalf of the Parliament I congratulate the speakers. The experience has been rewarding. Thank you very much.

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — I second the Premier's vote of thanks to the speakers, Dr Penington, Mr Neil Comrie, Dr Rob Moodie, Major David Brunt, Archbishop George Pell, Professor Margaret Hamilton, Mr Andy Hamilton and Mr Peter Wearne, for their excellent contributions today. Their words were informative, very thought provoking, constructive and full of ideas, which is important. It is one thing to be a commentator on issues, but it is a step forward to also make constructive suggestions and introduce thoughts that can be built upon.

The speakers have all challenged us as elected members of Parliament in both houses to build on the work that has been done today and to take some significant steps. While initially they may be baby steps, let us turn them into giant strides to make a real difference to the issue of drugs in our society. We have been given a great challenge in dealing with the issues of prevention, early intervention and diversion for the next generation in our society so that in 10 years time we may look back and say that today made a real difference in ensuring that young people did not succumb to a life of drugs and crime which, unfortunately, has already happened to so many.

Mr RYAN (Leader of the National Party) — I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in commending each of the speakers who have addressed us today. One of the great virtues of the range of speakers is that each has contributed something from their own life's experience in a practical and pragmatic way.

I am grateful to them for giving their time to make those contributions. Each speaker left a message for us. With due respect to them all, the final message delivered by Peter Wearne, who spoke about the faith and hope which we owe our young people, was the thread that linked all, and is the one that is most

compelling for us to act upon as parliamentarians. I thank each of the speakers.

Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) — I briefly thank the speakers who came into the house today. I was not in the house during the first of these momentous summits. I hope that party-political sniping may be left behind so that we may do something useful to stop so many of our young people disappearing into the black hole that is a wasted life caused by drug abuse.

The SPEAKER — I ask honourable members to agree to the vote of thanks by showing their appreciation.

Honourable members applauded.

The SPEAKER — I declare it agreed to unanimously!

I thank our guests and ask them to do us the honour of taking their seats in the Speaker's gallery and following the remainder of the debate.

I thank Mr President and members of the Legislative Council for accepting the invitation of the Legislative Assembly to participate in these proceedings.

Proceedings terminated 5.17 p.m.

